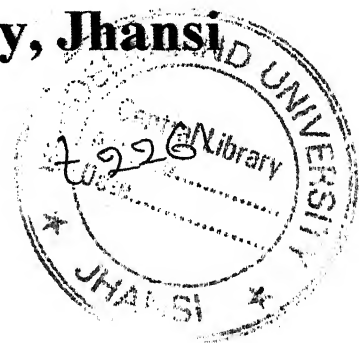


**Myth and Modernity in the  
Novels of  
Shashi Deshpande**

**THESIS**

**SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that *Ms. Jyoti Chugh* has worked under my supervision for her doctoral dissertation, titled "*Myth and Modernity in The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*" for more than twenty-four months. The thesis embodies *Ms. Jyoti Chugh's* discovery and original analysis of the various aspects of the subject.

To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis

1. Embodies the work of the candidate herself;
2. Has been duly completed;
3. Fulfills the requirement of the ordinance relating to the Ph.D. degree of the University and
4. It is upto the standard both in respect of contents and language for being referred to the examiners.

5. The Research Scholar has attended 200 days at the Center in my supervision

Place: Jhansi

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Place: *Thane*  
Date: *21/7/06*

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis "Myth And Modernity in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande" submitted to the Bundelkhand University, Jhansi for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, embodies my own evaluation of the various aspects of the subject.

I further declare that the content of the thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any diploma or degree of any other institution, nor is it being submitted to any other University for any award.

Place: Jhansi

Date: 21/07/06

Karla Karand

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*Sybil Chugh*

*Kula Kaul*



**SHASHI DESHPANDE**

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# CHAPTER 1

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is a truth universally acknowledged that, women, who are physically and mentally equipped to perform on par with men, are not only denied existence as complete human beings, but also deprived of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their thoughts and their anguish.

The feminist movement, which started in the West in the 1960s, went a long way in arresting the injustice meted out to women.

The nineteenth century French dramatist, Alexander Dumas, was the first to use the term 'feminism'. To refer to the then-emerging movement for women's right, which was mostly limited to politics, it gradually spread across the world securing complete political, social, economic and educational rights for women. That movement influences many Indian and other writers but in the later part of the twentieth century, it swept across the world, shaking it out of its centuries old complacency, making people think anew about old-age beliefs. In India, a population steeped in religious beliefs, superstition and tradition did not readily influenced by this movement. The *Manu Smriti*, which has been widely accepted in India as a text laying down the rules of social behaviour, declares:

"Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the male of the family: in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons.... Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as God."<sup>1</sup>

Feminism, thus, plays little or no part in the lives of most Indians. A few Indian writers in English have attempted to challenge the age-old myth surrounding the man-woman relationship. It has succeeded in their attempt, if

not in finding an ideal solution, but, at least in creating an awareness of the existing equalities in society.

According to the historian Linda Gordan, feminism is "An analysis of women's subordination for purpose of figuring out how to change it"<sup>2</sup>. Women constitute roughly half the world's population, but their contribution in various fields of activity has been totally disproportionate to their numerical strength. Branded as the weaker sex they have been denied full justice- social, economic and political. An awareness of the inequalities present in society resulted in the women's Liberation Movement as late as the mid-nineteenth century. The credit for providing an impetus to such a movement must certainly go to pioneers like Simone de Beauvoir, who sought to shatter the myth of femininity in her book, *The Second Sex*. First published in French in the year 1949, it was later translated into English making it accessible to the rest of the world. With frankness hitherto unheard of, she writes:

"All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, and become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? Or is it a platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination".<sup>3</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir draws heavily on various disciplines like biology, psychology and history to express her ideas clearly. She studies in detail issues



like a girl's education, marriage, prostitute, and domestic chores, which she describes as unpaid drudgery. She discusses frankly topics, which were hitherto considered to be taboo-sexual initiation and sexual pleasure for women. She also seeks to debunk the sentimental propaganda about maternity.

Though Beauvior's book sowed the seeds for a revolution, it did not exactly initiate the women's movement. The book, which sparked off the movement, was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine mystique*, published in 1963. Fifteen years after graduating from college, Friedan conducted interviews with many of her erstwhile classmates and the result of this survey proved that the general assumption of a woman achieving happiness and contentment in marriage and motherhood was false. Most of the women interviewed by Friedan were wives and mothers, ostensibly blessed with all the comforts of life. Yet the survey proved that they were merely playing the role of a devoted wife and loving mother and were supposed to seek fulfillment in it. Friedan holds the view:

"For a woman, as for a man, the need for self-fulfillment-autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization-is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. Women's sexual problems are, in this sense, by-product of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfill her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminine fulfillment ignores".<sup>4</sup>

Friedan's book was followed by Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* in 1969. Millett is considered to be another important feminist of the twentieth century. She vociferously argues that in the patriarchal society, woman has been accorded a demeaning position. She gives a graphic explanation of the

insecurities faced by women and she anticipates the problem which society would face one day in the form of female feticide with the result of rapid scientific development which would enable pre-natal sex determination tests.

She says:

"The gnawing suspicion that plague any minority member, that myths propagated about his inferiority might after all be true often reaches remarkable proportions in the personal insecurities of women. Some find their subordinate position so hard to bear that they repress and deny its existence. But a large number will recognize and admit their circumstances when they are properly phrased. Of two studies which asked women if they would have preferred to be born male, one found that one fourth of one sample admitted as much, and another sample, one half, when inquired of children, who have not yet developed as serviceable techniques of evasion, what this choice might be, if they had one, the answers of female children in a large majority of cases clearly favour birth into the elite group, whereas boys overwhelmingly reject the option of being girls. The phenomenon of parents' prenatal preferences for male issue is too common to require much elaboration. In the light of the imminent possibility of parents actually choosing the sex of their child, such a tendency is becoming the cause of some concern in scientific circles"<sup>5</sup>.

Propagating the same brand of militant feminism, Germaine Greer feels that marriage as an institution must be abolished because, "if women are to affect a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry"<sup>6</sup>.

The women's movement also produced a number of feminist novelists. Sylvia Plath's *Bell Jar* took American women by storm. The novel depicts the transformation of the young, innocent and oppressed heroine, Esther, into a vengeful Diana. The novelist uses the exquisitely handcrafted mat made by Mrs. Willard, one of the characters in the book, to symbolize the oppression of women. This mat is not used for interior decoration as some object of art but rather as a kitchen mat to be soiled under the feet of Mrs. Willard. It makes Esther think:

“ And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out under his feet like Mrs. Willards's kitchen mat”<sup>7</sup>

Other feminist novelists in the West like Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Marilyn French and Margaret Atwood have created a niche for themselves in the literature produced in this century. They have come a long way from the handicaps and constraints faced by their counterparts two hundred years ago. Women in those days did not dare defy the rigid norms laid down by society. While it was permissible for men to ignore social decorum and prudish notions of morality, a woman writer was expected to restrict herself only to certain areas of life. Even such writing was possible only after much sacrifice. Writing about women writers, Anne Stevenson comments:

“It is surprising how many spinster writers there have been: Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Stevie Smith, Charlotte Mew, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop. These women may have suffered, but they suffered

as women who attempted neither to fight male domination nor compromise themselves to suit it. Theirs was a narrow independence, even a selfish one, but it was real. It was bought at the price of what used to be called 'womanliness'- sex, marriage, children and the socially acceptable position of a wife"<sup>8</sup>

Society has undergone a great change since then. No longer do women writers have to assume pseudonyms, as in the case of George Eliot, to shield their identity. Women writers today enjoy a relatively greater measure of freedom and do not hesitate to explore regions of experience that were earlier considered taboo. Even in a conservative nation like India, we now have Shobha De who has dared to enter the exclusively male domain of pornography and become a commercial success.

In general, however, Western feminists far outnumber their Indian counterparts and are a lot more stridently feminist in their approach. In India, the first generation of Indian writers in English- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao missed out a great opportunity. A wealth of material in the form of the freedom struggle and the women involved in it seemed to have escaped their notice. Anand had been too deeply involved in championing the cause of the underdog in society to pay attention to the travails of women. His protagonist Gauri in *The Old Woman And The Cow*, however, is a fine example of his idea of women's emancipation at least some of Narayan's women characters of everyday life try to assert themselves in their desire for a career or their need for physical gratification. If he has portrayed the meek and submissive woman in Margayya's wife in his novel *The Financial Expert* and Savitri in *The Dark Room*, he has also created vibrant and sometimes radical

women characters like Daisy and Rosie in his novel, *The Painter Of Signs* and *The Guide* respectively. These heroines, however, are not role models whose experiences are meant to be emulated. Talking of Daisy, Shanta Krishnaswamy says:

"She is unique in that she is able to cast aside all culturally imposed feelings of guilt and shame on womanhood and sex. Narayan, however, in depriving her of personal fulfillment in marriage and domesticity, warns us about the excesses of rampant feminism which would lead to a destructive or deathlike androgynous blurring of the two sexes"<sup>9</sup>

The women in Raja Rao's fiction are reduced to mere automatons. Those of his women characters, who aspire for more, end up feeling bitter like Saroja or settle for passivity like Savitri, dutifully playing her role as the wife of a government officer in *The Serpent and the Rope*. The women in his novels are victims of domestic injustice and tyrannical tradition, but he proposes no solution to their dilemma. This may be because as Shanta Krishnaswamy says,

"The culture he springs from and which he has imbibed so thoroughly in his entire being, precludes Rao from resolving the woman's issue in concrete terms." In Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels, woman is the epitome of all virtues and plays an important role in bringing about social reform. But in spite of being pure and noble, she is victimized. Kajoli in *So Many Hungers!* Reveals an unconquerable spirit in the face of endless suffering and misery. The city-bred Mohini in *Music for Mohini* transforms the village, Behula, symbolic of a country

steeped in superstition and obsolete customs, into a model village with the help of her progressive-minded husband. However, it may be said, "the picture he paints of the woman is idyllic, tender and charming, sometimes even too optimistic to be realistic". (353)

Thus, while writing about women, men tend to go to extremes-either highlighting their weaknesses or deifying them and putting them on a pedestal, making the characters seem unreal. Women writers, on the other hand, are more honest in their portrayal of women in their novels. Kamala Markandaya very successfully portrays the double pulls that the Indian woman is subjected to- between her desire to assert her dignity as human being and her duty as a daughter, wife and mother. She also points out how the distortions in the economic and social order affect women more than men. Through her protagonist Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, she proves that within the traditional role, she can accommodate her other roles as a human being, and not through alienation and self-laceration, but through expansion and communion a deeper self-knowledge can be attained. Another example is Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire*, who is determined to overcome her problems in her own way. It is perhaps only in *Possession* that Markandaya transforms the traditionally suppressed woman into a domineering and tyrannical possessor. In most of her other novels, however, the woman is a source of dormant strength and shores up the male protagonist from collapse.

Anita Desai explores the disturbed psyche of modern Indian women. Her protagonists are usually highly intelligent and sensitive women who end up exhausted and on the verge of mental crises in their attempt to manage a home and children and find emotional fulfillment. They usually resort to

drastic steps when their predicament reaches a climax. Maya in *Cry, the peacock* is highly sensitive, caring woman bound in marriage to the practical, down-to-earth lawyer Gautama, who remains totally oblivious to his wife's emotional needs. Physically and emotionally, her body and mind crave for attention, the denial of which leads to dire consequences with Gautama being pushed to his death by her. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Describes the gnawing void in the life of Sita by reviewing her life as a woman, wife and mother. It is an intense story of a middle-aged woman torn between her desire to abandon her comfortable, albeit boring, existence and the realization that the bonds that bind her to it cannot easily be broken. Desai, in all her novels, presents the predicament of sensitive women characters, who find it very difficult to adjust them in the present mechanical and urbanized set up. She, however, makes no attempt to find solutions to their various problems.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is mostly preoccupied with the travails of the white woman in India. She writes predominantly from her own viewpoint with her bitter experiences in an alien land. Her portrayal of women is very limited and narrow, and provokes Shanta Krishanaswamy to comment that " Her examples of women in her fiction seem to make people unacquainted with India believes that all Indian women are contemptible, flighty or neurotic and pathetic creatures". (356)

Nayantara Sahgal, another prominent Indian woman writer, started writing before the feminist movement was launched in the sixties. Yet she has dealt with problems concerning women who went on to become major issues in the feminist movement. She writes sensitively of the way women suffer owing to sexist bias in a patriarchal set-up. In *The Day in Shadow*, she gives a

sensitive account of the suffering of a woman in Indian society when she chooses to divorce her husband. The protagonist Smirit feels diminished and humiliated not only by the stigma attached to divorce but also by the cruel 'consent term' of the divorce which compel her to pay a staggering amount of tax on an income she cannot even use. The novel, however, cannot be labelled feminist because Smirit, in spite of her liberated way of thinking, does not have the courage to stand without male support. If it is not her husband Som, it is Raj, who she later depends on to solve her problems. *In Rich Like Us*, Ram inflicts great emotional violence on both his wives Mona and Rose. Though both the women are aware of the injustice done to them, habit makes them willing victims of exploitation and injustice, Sahgal, it must be observed, works out her feminist ideas in a limited world. She usually restricts herself to the study of women of one class-the elite. She makes a close and sensitive study of the sufferings of the women of this class and shows how they refuse to remain chained to their subordinate roles, and how they defy traditional norms in search of emancipation. Most of her works, however, also deal with the impersonal world of politics in a story running parallel to the main theme of the personal world of man-woman relationships.

## **1.1 CRITICAL OVERVIEW**

### **LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE**

In the context of contemporary Indian writing in English, Deshpande is one of the most understated yet confident voices, which explores individual and universal predicaments through the female psyche. In one of her interviews she says, "I do not like to call myself a feminist writer. I say I am a feminist, but do not write to propagate an ism"<sup>10</sup>



Shashi Deshpande occupies a significant place among contemporary women novelists who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity. She says, "Basically, mine is a quest for the human self within the woman"<sup>11</sup>. Her protagonists are modern, educated young women, crushed under the weight of a male-dominated and tradition bound society. Her attempt to give an honest portrayal of their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations makes her novels susceptible to treatment from the feminist angle. She, however, maintains that her novels are not intended to read as feminist texts. This is evident from what she says:

"A woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspect of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings. I do not see why this has to be labelled feminist fiction".<sup>12</sup>

Ibsen, who heralded the idea of woman's emancipation with his character, Nora, in *A Doll's House*, also disclaims any connection with women's rights, he says: "Of course, it is incidentally desirable to solve the problem of women; but that has not been the portrayal of human beings".<sup>13</sup>

While it may not have been Deshpande's intentions to propound any particular theory, even a cursory reading of her novels displays a tremendous amount of sympathy for women. Most of her protagonists are educated and exposed to western ideas. As Ramamoorthy puts it, "Her heroines speak of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Betty Friedan and it becomes obvious that the women she has created are feminists if she is not one"<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the attitudes and reactions of her protagonist to various issues related to women who are caught between tradition and modernity do provide ample material for treatment from a feminist angle. She has written '*Roots*

*And Shadows*' (1983), *'The Dark Holds No Terroers'* (1980), *'That Long Silence'* (1988), *'The Binding Vine'* (1993), *'A Matter Of Time'* (1996), and *'Small Remedies'* (2000). That's in addition to two short crime novels- *'If I die today'* and *'Come UP And Be Dead'* (1983)- and six volumes of short stories. Besides this, Deshpande has also written books of children.

A reading of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals a deep understanding of the female psyche particularly that of the educated, urban, middle-class woman. Deshpande is undoubtedly an outstanding Indian English novelist with four volumes of short stories, four children's books and six novels to her credit. She was born and brought up in Dharwad, Karnataka, and is the daughter of renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Sriranga, who is described as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre. She graduated in economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay and in law from the Government Law College, Bangalore. Much later, she took a postgraduate degree from the Mysore University. She married Dr. Deshpande, a neuropathologist in 1962 and in the initial years of her marriage was largely given over to bringing up her two sons. Recounting the influences in her life, Shashi Deshpande says: "There are three things in my early life that have shaped me as a writer. These are: That my father was a writer, that I was educated exclusively in English and that I was born a female"<sup>15</sup>.

In an interview to Vanamala Vishwanath, Shashi Deshpande says that she began writing most casually and without any intention of setting down to a career in writing. She had accompanied her husband, a commonwealth scholar, to England and lived there for a year. In order not to forget her experiences in England, she began writing them down. The fact that they were

found worthy of being published encouraged her to try a career in journalism. A stint at Onlooker further encouraged her to try her hand at short stories and, in a sudden burst of creativity, she wrote several short stories, which were published in reputed magazines, and which were later compiled into four volumes. Her first collection of short stories *The Legacy*, published in 1972, was prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University, other collection of short stories are *It Was Dark*, *The Miracle* and *It Was Nightingale*. In between, Shashi Deshpande also tried her hand at detective writing and wrote three detective serials, two of which were subsequently expanded and published as regular novels- *Come up and Be Dead* and *If I Die Today*. The racy style of narration made these books quite popular but Deshpande herself considers them as failures.

A close study of Deshpande's short stories and novels reveal an author who is intelligent, articulate and relatively free from prejudice regarding gender, but at the same time highly sensitive to the issues involving women. The relentless probing of men- women relationship by the author intrigues the reader enough to question her stand on feminism. Deshpande is perhaps the only Indian author who has made a bold attempt to give voice to the frustrations and disappointments of women despite her vehement denial of being feminist.

*Roots And Shadows* is the first full-length novel written by Deshpande though it was published after *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel. The novel highlights the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She finds herself alienated when she refuses to conform to the rigid code laid down by society.

Marriage to the man of her choice brings only disillusionment when she finds her educated and ostensibly progressive minded husband no different from the average Indian male. She is even contemptuous of herself when she realizes that she has all along been unconsciously aping the model of the idea of an Indian wife. The novel gains its feminist stance from Indu's persistent exploration of herself as an individual. Extra-marital affair helps her to break free from the emotional bondage of matrimony and makes her aware of herself and realize that it is possible to exercise autonomy within the parameters of marriage. *Roots And shadows* also offers us scope to observe meaningless ritual and custom all of which help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. Seen through the novelist's eyes, insignificant everyday details take on a new dimension and highlight the gross inequalities present in society.

Deshpande's second novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, seeks to discuss the male ego, which refuses to accept a secondary refuses to accept a secondary position in marriage. The novel narrates the harrowing experience of the protagonist, Saru, who enjoys a greater economic and social status than her husband Manohar. The trauma of being the victim of her husband's frustration that manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism is vividly portrayal. Deshpande also makes the readers aware of society's reaction to the superior status of wife in a marriage, which leads the husband to develop an inferiority complex. The novel also seeks to discuss the blatant gender discrimination, which is shown even by parents towards their daughters. Deshpande effectively conveys the craving by parents for male child and the disastrous effect it can have on a sensitive young girl. Denied of parental love and victim of her husband's frustration, Saru commences an arduous journey

into her and liberate herself from guilt, shame and humiliation to emerge in full control over her life.

Deshpande's third novel, *That Long Silence*, brought her into limelight as it was published by British feminist publishing house, Virago. The novel; deals with the protagonist Jaya's passage through a maze of self-doubts and fears towards the affirmation of herself. A crisis in the middle-class family of the protagonist triggers off a chain of events, which compel her to view her life in retrospection, what follows, is an honest and frank account of Jaya's life. In her anxiety to play the role of wife and mother to perfection, Jaya realizes that she does not do justice to her talents as a writer. Her constant fear of displeasing her husband and inviting the censure of society, not only make her give up writing but also discourage her from acknowledging her friendship with a man who is not her husband, brother and father.

Jaya is representative of the modern young woman - educated and aware- nevertheless unable to break free from the stronghold of tradition. In the process of telling her story, she offers us a glimpse into the lives of ostensibly content housewives who are nevertheless suppressed under the weight of male dominance. Deshpande, however, avoids the facile solution of laying the blame on men alone and tries to view the men - women relationship objectively. She observes through her novel that both men and women, being products of their culture, find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by society.

In her fourth novel, *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande uses the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi to focus attention on victims like Kalpana and Mira- victims of man's lust and woman's helplessness. The novelist makes a

bold attempt to portray the agony of a wife who is the victim of marital rape- a theme which perhaps has not been touched upon any other Indian writer in English. Urmi tries to reconstruct the pathetic story of a bright and attractive girl, Mira, who wrote poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage to alleviate her suffering. Urmi also crusades for the cause of another victim, Kalpana, who is brutally raped and is on her deathbed. The novelist deftly handles the juxtaposition of the two situations- rape committed within the precincts of marriage and outside it. The novelist gives a moving account of the plight of women raped outside marriage, who would rather suffer in silence than be exposed to the humiliation involved in publicizing the event and that of married women whose bodies are violated by their legally wedded husbands but who would never dare reveal this to anyone. They would rather stifle their voice of protest for the sake of social and moral security. Deshpande, through the voice of Urmi, also offers us a glimpse into the lives of myriad other women, who are ostensibly more liberated than their predecessors but, who nevertheless, are victims of some form of violence or deprivation.

In her novel, *A Matter Of Time*, Deshpande liberates herself from the narrow confines of women and their problems and enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. The novel is essentially the story of three women from three generations from the same family and how they cope with the tragedy that overwhelms them. But in narrating their story a greater emphasis has been placed on Gopal, the perpetrator of this tragedy, and his view of life.

Shashi Deshpande's novel, *Small Remedies* is the most confident assertion of her strength as a novelist with her deliberate denial of sentimentality and her total control over the unwieldy material. Structured as a biography within a biography, it is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing doyenne of Hindustani music, who denies a marriage and a home with a view to pursuing her genius. It also tells the story of Leela, who gives up her respectability in order to gain love and unhappiness in equal measure. At the center of this sprawling narrative is Madhu who, in telling the stories of Savitribai, Leela and Munni, hopes to find a way out of her own despair.

*Come Up and Be Dead* and *if I Die Today*, two of Deshpande's detective serials which have been expanded and published as novels have not been included for study in this book because the very nature of their themes is totally at variance with the subject of this study. Shashi Deshpande's interest in detective fiction is obvious from her review of *A Women's Eye: New Stories by the Best Women Crime Writers*. Her remarkably sagacious assessment of the stories leaves one in no doubt about her love for genre. But a reading of both her detective novels drives home the point that to review a book and write one are two entirely different things. The books are at the best amateurish as Deshpande herself has acknowledged.

*Come Up and Be Dead* has been compared unfavourably with Agatha Christie's *Cat among Pigeons*, because the setting for both novels is a girl's school where a series of murders take place. The novel, which starts briskly enough, falters towards the middle and is unable to hold the reader's interest in the true tradition of a whodunit. *If I Die Today* is set in the resident quarters of a large charity hospital where again there are series of killings beginning with



the murder of the terminally ill-patient Guru. The vast numbers of characters in the area, their frustrations and disappointments, their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities provide enough material for a gripping murder mystery. But what could have been a taut suspense story meanders aimlessly taking the readers along to an uninspiring end. If both the novels have fallen short of the reader's expectations, it may be because the novelist has set a high standard for herself in her other published works. It is easy to see that what Deshpande is best at is portrayal of human relationships and the turmoil's raging in the minds of her female protagonists who are unfairly treated by their parents, husbands, and society in general. Deshpande is so acutely aware of the inequalities present in society that even her detective stories are replete with examples to prove the same.

The chief female characters in *Come Up and Be Dead*, the school principal, Kshama, and her housekeeper/cousin, Devayani, are spinsters. They are typical examples of women caught between the modern idea of freedom and the traditional need for a husband and home of their own. Kshama is an efficient administrator and possesses an ostensibly unruffled manner but her thoughts reveal the agitation and complexes within her. Devayani seems quite content with her role as a housekeeper but we find her musing now and then about the uselessness of her life, "But I was neither daughter nor wife nor mother now. What was I then? Nothing? In a sense, it was restful to be nothing. And yet there was this feeling too. ...I might as well be dead."<sup>16</sup> This is may be Deshpande's way of showing that even a person as well read as Devayani who quotes frequently from Shakespeare and Dickens, is still the product of a culture which declares a woman's experience as incomplete



without marriage. Through the character of Jyoti Raman, a schoolteacher, Deshpande also hints at the sexual aggression of men tolerated silently by women. Mrs. Raman is somehow able to free herself from her husband by threatening to commit suicide but there are many others who are not so lucky.

The narrator Manju in *If I die Today* is quite different from the average Indian woman who views matrimony and motherhood as the ultimate happiness in life. She resents the fact that her children are a barrier to her independence. Motherhood, she thinks, "is a trap, keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom until you forget what the word 'freedom' means."<sup>17</sup> It is obvious also that she does not approve of her daughter displaying any typically female characteristics like fear or cowardice. "I didn't want her to grow up a clinging vine. I wanted her to be fearless and independent." (45). Deshpande also tries to unmask the outwardly sophisticated and well-educated person's yearning for a son and heir. Pitying Mariga for being unkindly treated by her 'oh-so-foreign' father, Dr. Kulkarni, Manju thinks: "Behind the pipe-smoking perfectly mannered phlegmatic style that he cultivated, was he after all, just a traditional Hindu man longing for son and heir? And taking it out on poor Mariga because she was only a girl?" (36). Deshpande also lays bare the feeble male ego, which cannot tolerate the idea of female superiority. Finding a sympathetic listener in Manju, Tony unburdens his marital problems to her: "Don't let them tell you, it doesn't matter who earns more money in a marriage. It does. There was Cyn before marriage crazy about me, looking up to me, ready to do anything for me. It didn't matter at all that I was just a Games Master and she was a medico. We were just crazy about each other (84).

Tony very succinctly sums up the main ingredient for a happy marriage. He is happy so long as his wife looks up to him but when she starts earning more than he does, he begins to think that she is patronizing him. The same situation is dealt with in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* where it is the main theme of the novel. It is obvious that in both her detective novels too, Deshpande is unable to remain unconcerned about the inner turmoils and sense of unfairness experienced by her female protagonist.

Shashi Deshpande started her literary career writing short stories. Her earlier stories were published in Indian magazine like Femina, Eve's Weekly and The Illustrated Weekly of India. Her first books were all collection of short stories. Published in 1993, "The Intrusion and Other Stories" is the latest of such collection.

The nineteen stories in " *The Intrusion And Other Stories*" prove once again that Deshpande is a master storyteller. The stories are marked by clear insight and are full of compassion and understanding for the human situation. Though true to her line of writing, women from the foundation of the stories, Deshpande's women in these stories encompass all ages and all social levels and context. Indian classical literatures as well as history are here in two stories: "Hear me Sanjaya" and "The Stone Women".

The voice of Deshpande's female protagonists is even more pronounced in her short stories. Her collection of short stories, *The Legacy*, has had the distinction of being prescribed as a textbook in Columbia University for a course in modern literature. The primary focus of attention in her short stories is woman-her frustration, pain and anguish. Her stories revolve around middle-class women in India who are unable to defy social

convention and seek a compromise as a way out of their dilemma. "An antidote to Boredom" is the story of a woman dissatisfied with her existence as the wife of an indifferent man and finds her involved with a young widower. Plagued with feelings of guilt towards her son (not husband) and nagged by the doubt whether she is merely seeking an antidote to boredom in her affairs, she lets the opportunity go, bitterly regarding it later. According to G.S Amur who has prefaced the book and considers this the best story in the collection, the story "Dramatizes the suffering of a woman who makes an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the prison of her fixed role as wife and live a life spontaneity"<sup>18</sup>.

*"The Intrusion"* records the horror of newly married women who's crass and insensitive husband violates her body exercising his conjugal rights. *"A Liberated Woman"* is the story of the catastrophic result of a marriage between a popular woman doctor and a mediocre college lecturer, because of the wounded male ego. Deshpande apparently felt that she could not do justice to them within the framework of a short story. Hence, she subsequently expanded the same idea in the form of her novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. *"Death Of a Child"* is the story of a lonely woman and her experience of guilt and shame caused by an abortion for which she is to be blamed. *"Why Robin"* is a highly sensitive story of a mother who feels isolated from her only daughter who has more in common with her father. The situation changes dramatically, however, when the child clings to her mother for comfort and security, on attaining puberty, thus giving a new meaning to the mother's life.

*"It Was Dark"*, the title story in the volume of short stories by the same name is a moving tale of the rape of school-girl. Deshpande evocatively

brings out the despair and anguish of her parents, particularly of the mother, who feels crushed with the feeling of guilt for having never cautioned her daughter on the dangers that might befall her. In "*The Inner Rooms*", Deshpande recreates a passage from *The Mahabharata* making the readers empathize with the plight of Amba bringing a new dimension to the oft-told story. "*A Wall is Safer*" highlights the injustice meted out to a woman who is expected to sacrifice her career to safeguard her marriage. The protagonist, Hema, a professional qualified and practicing lawyer has no option but to throw up her career and follow her husband, Vasanth into wilderness, close to the project he has undertaken. Hema's friend and colleague Sushma is aghast and ask Vasanth what he expects Hema to do in the 'middle of nowhere'. Vasantha replies without hesitation that she can take-up teaching. Sushma retorts that she is a lawyer and not a teacher and asks him if he would change his profession overnight. She makes a valid point here challenging most men's attitude towards their wives' careers.

The title story in the volume *It Was the Nightingale* is written in contrast to "*A Wall is Safer*". Here, the protagonist, lovingly called Jayu by her husband, is all set to go abroad for a couple of years to pursue her career. Though she is aware that the long separation will equally painful for both herself and her husband, she is determined not to let the opportunity go. She justifies her decision by saying, "To me, our lives are intertwined, yet they are two different strands."<sup>19</sup>. The protagonist in "*A Man And Woman*" is a young passionate widow who develops an illicit physical relationship with her younger brother-in-law. "*The Duel*" is the story of a widow who succumbs to the seduction of a male writer. These stories are examples of Deshpande's

bold assertion of woman's sexuality. In "*A Day Like Another*". The wife is aware of husband's infidelity but does not revolt, for the sake of domestic harmony. She would rather suffer the pain and humiliation than revolt and upset the relationship, which has taken years to build.

The story, "*I want*," in the volume, *The Miracle and Other Stories*, revolves around the protagonist whose opinions are never taken into account – first by her father with regard to her marriage, and later by her fiancé with regard to her career. As a girl who has crossed the generally accepted marriageable age, she is expected to marry the first man who agrees to marry her. She is also expected to give in to his wishes and express no such desire, which might jeopardize the proposal. Her opinions and aspirations therefore remain unvoiced. The husband in the story, "*The Shadow*," is broad-minded enough to accept his wife who has committed adultery, but his generosity does not stretch any further to accommodate the child born of this union. Perhaps this is expecting too much from men who normally do not tolerate even the slightest deviation from socially accepted behavior on the part of their wives. "*The Awakening*" is a pathetic story of a young girl's sudden awareness of the harsh realities of life. Deshpande very sensitively depicts the dreams and aspirations of a young girl on the threshold of life who is forced to come to a compromise and take on the responsibilities of her family on her young shoulders.

Most of the short stories are reprinted in a single paperback edition entitled *The Intrusion and Other Stories*, published by Penguin India in 1993. Almost all her short stories are women centered, dealing with woman in different roles wife, mother, daughter and an individual in a society

conditioned by the rigid codes laid down by man. Modern women, as her novels, therefore as true to life and representative of the dilemma faced by modern women, as her novels. As G.S. Amur rightly observes: "Woman's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer, and this appears in all her important stories".<sup>19</sup>

A comprehensive analysis of all her work leaves one in no doubt about where Deshpande's sympathies lie. It would be unfair to label her 'feminist' and categorise her with several other writers who differ from her in varying degrees. She can at best be called an articulator of women who are caught at the crossroads of change in a society, which is undergoing the birth pangs of transition from tradition to modernity. It is a difficult job, indeed, to give voice to women who themselves are not sure of their own suffering and who stand in an unenviable position today. They are acutely aware of the injustices heaped on them but are condemned to live the life of suppression, which was the lot of their predecessors. In many ways, their condition is even more pitiable than that of women of earlier generation who unquestioningly accepted their secondary position in society. Her novels contain so much that is the material of feminist thought- myriad roles of woman as mother/wife/daughter, identity crisis women's sexuality- that all those who have interviewed her so far have inevitably asked her as to what extent she considers herself a feminist. She says:

"I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my

feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it”<sup>20</sup>.

Perhaps, the reason why Deshpande takes exception to her works being labelled ‘feminist’ is the misconception in the minds of most people regarding the term, feminism.

Other women writers have voiced similar apprehensions and it is interesting to observe their reactions to being thus classified. In an interview conducted by Sue Dickman, many important women writers in English and the regional languages in India have, not surprisingly, expressed similar sentiments. Mahashweta Devi, the well-known Bengali writer Sahitya Akademi Award winner, who is also a social activist, says: “I am a woman, and I am writing. But I am not writing of women alone. What I am writing, most of my books, it is about class exploitation, the under class is exploited, men, women together. Of course, women get the worst part of it, but not always.”<sup>21</sup>

Mahashweta Devi, like Mulk Raj Anand, is more concerned with exploitation than gender exploitation, but she admits that women are at greater disadvantage among the exploited lower classes. C.S Lakshmi (Ambai), a Tamil writer, who also has a few film scripts to her credit, has reservations about being called a woman writer. She says: “When a man writes, even when he writes about a woman, it has universal qualities. But when I write, if it is about a woman, it gets particularized.”<sup>22</sup>



Deshpande is equally uncomfortable about being categorized as a woman-writer and denies being a feminist writer with a mission. She does not trace the influences in her writing of the feminists like Simone de Beauvoir or Germaine Greer, though she agrees that they helped to place her confusions, and put them in order. She, however, maintains that she read the works of these feminists much after she started writing. The issues, which she feels strongly about, are the degradation that women experience and continue to experience and the subordination and inequality. According to her:

"Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is difficult to apply Kate Millett or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husbands, children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it."<sup>23</sup>

Deshpande feels that women have a tremendous inner strength, but so much of that strength is used up in merely enduring. Her idea of feminism is best summed up in her words: "For me feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive: a real strength."

## 1.2 AIMS AND APPROACHES

For ages, women have been under the duress of every possible authority - man, community religion-which deems itself the custodian of their life and morals. An independent identity has always eluded them: they are



programmed by society. The categorization of women as homemakers, not allowed to cross the 'threshold' has been handed down from generation-to-generation, and is a world-wide phenomenon, cutting across all barriers of race, community and country. This myth of womanhood has created more of a cocoon rather than a halo, around the woman suppressing her individuality, and has been carefully nurtured over the centuries -thus creating the notion of two worlds- the one within and the other without. Men have traditionally passed over the threshold unchallenged and partaken of both worlds but women have been expected to inhabit only the one world contained by the boundaries of home. A step over the bar is an act of transgression. Having committed that, they may never re-enter then designated first world. Thus traditionally the world beyond the threshold is an unknown arena of male activity, and the woman had to be contented with being designated as Griha Lakshmi. It is this myth of womanhood which gives rise to all the subsequent does-and-don'ts that are strictly adhered to while bringing up the girl child.

One of the dictionary definitions of the word myth is: "A widely held but false belief... an exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing" Thus it is with this connotation of the word with which this present thesis is concerned. There are widely held views and ideas with regard to women who are placed on a pedestal in our country but the reality is very different. Ours is a male dominated society, which desires to keep women in a traditional status quo. Our society doesn't like changes, it prefers keeping people in their place be it have-nots, scheduled castes or women. For hundreds of years women have been exploited. The only difference in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that at least the glass is half full.

Throughout history, most societies have held women in an inferior status compared to that of men. Women's status was often justified as being the natural result of biological difference between the sexes. In many societies for example, people believed women to be naturally more emotional and less decisive than men. Women were also held to be less intelligent and less creative by nature. But research shows that women and men have the same range of emotional, intelligence, and creative characteristics. Many sociologists and anthropologists maintain that various cultures have taught girls to behave according to negative stereotype (image) of feminist, thus keeping alive the idea that women are naturally inferior not only in ancient times but an in modern times. Society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle dependent and submissive. Family life and the work patterns convey the idea that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man. She is the mother of man who subsequently rules over her and wants to protect her and keep her under his control.

In the pre Aryan age woman was free and equal to man. It was only in the Middle Ages down to the present one that the male-ordained moralist society raised four walls for her to prohibit her from the rights equal to man. Her position in the family as well as in society kept changing all through the ages and is almost invariably an inferior one. She is hardly given any freedom Shantha Krishnaswamy, explaining the position of women in society, points out:

"She is a creature who, as a child is sold off to strangers for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband's family, or who as a widow, in a final act of obliteration

immolates herself on her dead husband's funeral pyre to be acclaimed as 'Sati-Savitri' as an immortal"<sup>24</sup>

The emergence of women writers writing in English in India is of great importance. It brings a new age of brightness for Indian women. Social reformers influenced by the great personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi and the foreign personalities like William Bentick had its great impact on the status of women in Indian society and brought them out of the tyranny of social evils. But the subordination still lingered long in the society and

"The relief from dependency was still out of the reach of most women. So the battle for emancipation was taken over by a few educated women who, in their effort to communicate to the world their own bitter experiences as women as well as their ideas of social reform, turned writers"<sup>25</sup>

Professor Alphonso Karkala observes;

"They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers both in India and abroad"<sup>26</sup>

Many sociologists find that a woman suffers due to her emotional attachment with home. She does not want to bear the pain of being away from home as a wife and mother. But since her sense of individuality has matured by introduction of education, she does not want to lead a passive married life of a sacrificial creature. She expects a measure of satisfaction. Promila Kapur, a sociologist analyzes the change: "With change in women's personal

status and social status has come a change in her way of thinking and feelings and the past half century has witnessed great changes in attitudes towards sex, love and marriage".<sup>27</sup> an Indian woman has to perform many roles at a time. Promila Kapur thinks that the husband is mainly responsible for the tensions.

India is a country that has faced many changes in her past and has always managed to adapt itself to new situations, similarly the woman of India, is malleable enough to adjust to different situations and the modern Indian novel keeps reflecting the changing images of our contemporary life.

### 1.3 A SCHEMATIC DESCRIPTION

Now a word about the scheme of the present thesis: Chapter Two Section One will analyze "*Roots And Shadows*" which was Deshpande's first novel published after the "*Dark Holds No Terrors*" and "*If I Die Today*". This is the first novel depicting woman at the crossroads of modern Indian society.

The next section will analyze "*The Dark Holds No Terrors*" which was Deshpande's first published novel which grew out of an early short story written by her, "*A Liberated Woman*". This Novel throws light on Saru's quest for identity against gender discrimination.

Chapter Three will comprise three sections: The first section will analyze "*That Long Silence*" and deal with Jaya's journey from crisis to affirmation.

Section two will discuss "*The Binding Vine*" as a study of the trauma of rape, both, within marriage as well as outside it. There will be a consideration of Mira and Kalpana as victims of such rape. The third section deals with the theme of female bonding.

Chapter four will be divided into two sections wherein there will be an in depth analysis of "*A Matter Of Time*" emphasizing multi-layered relationships in the novel.

In the first section there will be an analysis of Sumi's search for identity and self-awareness. Section two will highlight Kalpana's self-abnegation and Aru's positivism.

Chapter five which will have two sections deals with "*Small Remedies*." In Section One I shall analyze the character of the main protagonist 'Savitribai Indorker', and describe her evolution from rebellion to success.

Section two will consist of an analysis of the other two relevant women character: Madhu and Leela there will be an emphasis on gender issues arising from gender inequality and the small remedies suggested by Deshpande.

The final chapter will conclude the thesis with a discussion of Deshpande's narrative style and method of writing and will further attempt to place the author in the general tradition of Indian women writing in English.

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# CHAPTER 2



## 2.1 INDU AT THE CROSS ROADS OF LIFE

In the preceding chapter we have examined the myth of womanhood, which defines the pattern of behaviour, which women were supposed to adhere to. We have seen how this myth was prevalent all over the world, in different races, cultures and countries. It is the omnipresence of this myth in Indian society that Shashi Deshpande is concerned with, which results in the hypocritical double standards that are enforced upon women in our country. She portrays her women characters as persons struggling to strike the right balance between the tradition encapsulated by this myth, and the modern world in which they live.

Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with the women belonging to the Indian middle class, who are brought up in a traditional environment and are struggling to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence. She is also the only contemporary writer who has given graphic details about the girl-child and her psychology. Most of her women characters are able to transcend their identity crisis by analyzing their childhood and the process of their upbringing. *Roots and Shadows* projects the educated women who are unable to enfranchise the traditional background in which they are reared.

The crux of all the prevailing problems of women are their subjugation, which is always present in the form of silent servitude not only in *Roots and Shadows* but also in other novels of Shashi Deshpande like the *Dark Holds No Terrors*, and *That Long Silence* also deals with the same problems. In the novel *Roots And Shadows* which explores the inner struggle of Indu, who represents a set of modern women who are educated and are very much in contact with the society, dealing with the critical problems like love,

sex, marriage, settlement and individuality. As O. P Bhatnagar says: "The novel deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, the male world and the society in general"<sup>1</sup> (27).

Shashi Deshpande writes her own experiences through the character of Indu in *Roots And Shadows*. She has written about the women who do not accept anything without reason and that is why they are trapped by myth and are standing at the cross roads of life.

Indu and all those women had their roots in the same place.

"Life as I saw it in a small town as a child, as a growing girl, Life as I saw it in Bombay as a woman. To be a child is to live in a world apart from the world of adults, to see the world of adults from a distance. And I saw it, the sharp, clean line dividing the world of men from the world of women. As a child I could cross over easily from one world into the other. Often I was the bridge. But as I grew up, I realized the bridge wasn't there any more. I had ceased to be one myself. I was trapped into a world of my own, but still, for same reason, outside the claustrophobic world of women."

"If Indu, motherless and with an absentee father didn't belong, if she was an outsider because of this, so was I because of an agnostic father who had broken from orthodoxy and family. But the women came to me all the same. And I watched them from a distance." (29-30)

Indu comes back to her ancestral place from where she, against the wishes of her father and the other members of the family, had accepted so many years ago to get married to a person of her own choice. She comes back

to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. The large family is on the threshold of change though everybody is unaware of it. And the key to their future lies in the hands of Indu.

Indu has been a determined girl, who always wanted to be free. But, how, a number of questions come before her, which leave her puzzled and baffled. She is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stronghold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband, which again, she feels, is not true love. She realizes that she has accepted Jayant not for love but because she wanted to show her family that she was a success. Is it her tragedy never to be free and complete? She goes back to her parent's home to find out the roots but she finds shadows instead.

Indu is projected against the women belonging to the older generation. Thus, the writer has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian set-up-one set is represented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitra Kaki, Kamla Kaki, Atya, Sunanda Atya; and Indu represents the other set. To the old generation, a woman's life is nothing "But to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand children" (128). And the ideal woman is the one who does not have her own identity: "A woman who sheds her 'I' who loses her identity in her husband"<sup>2</sup> (54). The new generation reviews everything with reason. As Indu tries to listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But unfortunately, in all her efforts, she fails miserably either due to the impact of the culture and tradition, or fear of stigma, or timidity or all these combined together.

Indu aspires to become independent and complete in her but finds so many hurdles coming in her way. She finds dominant Akka and her family to

be a great hindrance to achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. So later on, Indu leaves the house and gets married to Jayant, who is her own choice. We find that, she leaves one house and enters another to be independent and complete, but ironically enough, soon she realizes the futility of her decisions: "Jayant and I ... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness but I can't fantasize". (14)

Indu laughs at the idea of not calling one's husbands by his name as it shortens the age of the husband. Later, she realizes that she too is not different from other women, as she always wants Jayant to be with her. The only difference is her reason for thinking so.

At one point in the novel when Naren tries to make love with her, she declares: "I'm essentially monogamous, for me, its one man and one man alone"(89). But, later she offers herself to him twice. And then the question haunts her how she will view this act of adultery.

Indu longs to be detached and independent but to no avail. She feels ashamed of herself when she does not see the things in practical form. She tells Naren: I am still and dead. And how when you tried to kiss me, I thought ... this is Jayant. So that's all I'm, Naren not a pure woman. Not a too faithful wife. But an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it (192). So we can see that Indu is not happy with her husband and has extra marital affair but so trapped in tradition that she does not want to cheat on her husband. This situation places her squarely on the crossroads of life.

On the one hand, she is ashamed of her not being a pure woman, but on the other hand, she hates her womanhood. She stops working for the

woman magazines: "Women, women, women.... I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the keys"(85-86).

Through the character of Indu Shashi Deshpande analyses

"The woman who burnt herself because her mother said she had shamed the family by talking to a boy in public.

The clever girl taken out of school because she got engaged and "they" did not want her to study any more.

I saw these again with Indu. And how, the knowledge shaped itself into words, ideas... the vulnerability of women. The deviousness of women. The helplessness of women. The courage of women. (90-91)

And the thought- was Indu's or mine? - I won't belong to that world, I won't be like them, my God, and I don't want to be like them.

Indu struggles hard to understand the life in reality, the actual cause that is destroying her married life. She feels that her sense of certainty, confidence and assurance is being destroyed in the presence of Jayant. And when she talks of such feelings to him, he would call it only "nonsense" and nothing else. Jayant never bothers to understand what she really wanted, what her feelings are. She joys with the idea of leaving Jayant. When she sees that there is no real understanding between them.

Shashi Deshpande writes. "Indu sprang out of the claustrophobic world with a courage I admired. She was free. But often to be free is to be lonely. I shared this bleak thought with Indu. Even today, the smell of Bombay is to me the smell of loneliness. But there is always the beacon light of love. And love leads to the certainty of marriage. But marriage invariably takes you back to

the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self-abnegation. To love another and to retain you intact-is that possible? To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate? ... Oh yes, you can't escape the shadows. The clearer the light, the darker the shadows. They follow you everywhere."

As a result of this instead of leaving Jayant, she goes back to him with the vain hope that the things will change.

Thus Shashi Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu, who raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the West. There was a time when the Indian woman was hailed as a "Prativrata, "a Sati" and something which has to be protected by man, but now she is aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her individuality.

## 2.2 SARU'S QUEST FOR IDENTITY AGAINST GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Like her first novel, Shashi Deshpande's second novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is about a well educated, economically independent woman's search for her identity which leads to uncover the dormant strength in human beings. It is the story of Sarita (called Saru) and her relationship with her parents and husband and her agonizing search for herself. It is the story of a marriage on the verge of breakdown and of a woman who has been made acutely conscious of her gender since childhood.

This novel explodes the myth of man's superiority and the myth of woman being a paragon of virtue.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the story of Sarita, often referred to as Saru in novel, and her confrontations and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Sarita who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother. She is not given any importance; no parental love is showered upon her even on her birthday. Her brother's birthday, however, is celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. When her brother is drowned, she is blamed for it. Her mother, in particular, always scolds her for being responsible for her son's death: "You killed him. Why did you not die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?"<sup>3</sup> (173). Due to her mother's accusations, Saru begins to wonder if in reality, she had killed him. It is much later, after rethinking and pondering over the event, after her mother's death, that she realizes the accidental nature of her brother's death.

Saru grows up and acquires education against her mother's will. As an educated young lady, her sense of reasoning and questioning develops. She

can, no more, tolerate inequality between brother and sister .She remembers how her brother was named. "They had named him Dhruva .I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly, a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day .The smell of flowers, the grinding stone...."(152).

The mother is very attached to her son .Her attitude is typical one- after all; he is male child and therefore one who will propagate the family lineage. In other sense, also, the male child is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give "agni" to his dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in forment .The first thought, when Saru hears the news of her mother's death, is: Who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died."(17)

When Dhruva was alive her mother's discrimination between the two had been very evident to Sarita. Saru had also to put up with constant reminders from her mother that she was dark complexioned and should not step into the sun lest it should worsen her colour .In one conversation with her mother:

"Do not go out in the sun, you'll get darker"

"Who cares?"

"We have to care if you don't .We have to get you married."

"I don't want to get married"

"Will you live with us all your life?"

"Why not?"

"You can't."

"And Dhruva?"

"He's different. He's a boy"(40).



Seeing the discrimination between her and her brother, as she grows up, resentment and hatred drive her to leave home and obsessively seek success in medical college. There she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parent's wishes. Her mother, being an old, traditional, orthodox woman, does not want her daughter to get married to a person who is from a lower caste:

"What caste is he?

I don't know.

A Brahmin?

Of course, not.

Then, cruelly... his father keeps a cycle shop. (87)

But Saru thinks that Manu is a means of that love and security which she had always lacked in life. He is the ideal romantic hero who has come to save her from the insecure, loveless existence. And she is hungry for love: "I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted." (35)

But happiness, as she soon discovers is only an illusion and one is left with memories, which are weighed with grief. As long as she is merely a medical student and her husband the breadwinner there is peace at home, even if 'home' is surrounded by filth and stench. The problems arise only when she gains recognition as a doctor. Saru remembers even the exact incident, which becomes a turning point in their existence. Once, there is a fire accident in a factory near- by and she returns home late, in a stupor, after helping out the victims, still wearing her bloodstained coat. The news spreads in the neighborhood that she is a doctor. Gradually people start paying more

attention to her than previously. Her neighbours keep coming to her with sundry complaints, glad to have a doctor in their midst. Saru does not observe the slow change in her husband, in the initial exhilaration at her exalted status as a doctor. In a retrospective mood, much later, however, she is able to trace the events, which lead to the disastrous condition of her marriage, saying: "He had been the young man and I his bride .Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband". (42)

Her inability to secure time for herself and her family (husband and children) upsets her family life. Manu, her husband, cannot tolerate people greeting her and ignoring him .He can not expresses it openly but says out of irritation: "I am sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon". (37) He does not love her the way he used to earlier. Saru realizes it: "Now I know that it was there it began ... this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage." (37). She starts hating the man-woman relationship, which is based on attraction and need and not love:

"Love... how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futilely ... turning into the thing they called "love." it's only a word she thought. Take away the word; the idea, and the concept will wither away. (65)

It is easy to identify the consequences of the shattering of the male ego. Saru dwells upon this at length in her father's house and tries to objectively analyse her share of the blame in the disaster that her marriage has been. Her rumination makes her think, "My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a

failure because I destroyed his manhood.” (217) Though this statement suggests a study in guilt consciousness, the novel in reality presents a stark picture of the gross inequality prevailing in our society: gender discrimination by the parents towards their own children and the superiority of the male in a marriage, if it must survive.

When asked by her friend Nalu to talk on “Medicine as a profession for woman” to some college students, Saru makes up an imaginary speech, which sarcastically sums up the condition necessary for a successful marriage:

“A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A., you should be a B.A., if he is 5’ 4” tall you shouldn’t be more than 5’ 3” tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety, if you want a happy marriage. Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive - secretary; principal teacher role .It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it is not worth it. He’ll suffer. You’ll suffer and so will the children. Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage must be equal. Partnership. That’s nonsense, rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it’s unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, god helps you, both of you” (137).

Saru’s bitter realization is that a woman must necessarily remain a step behind her husband. Surprisingly enough, no less a person than John Ruskin holds a similar view. “A man ought to know any language or science he learns, thoroughly; while a woman ought to know the same language or

science only so far may enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends.<sup>4</sup> (63)

This is an awkward situation in which she is placed. At a personal level, she feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment, which she had once developed. It is now replaced by a psychological conflict, which is uncalled for but inevitable, given the situation in which both of them have been placed. Most of the solemn duties towards her husband and children are unattended to. The children do not get proper love and care from their mother as she gets late in returning home. The husband sits waiting: "I came home late that night.... when I came home I found him sitting with a brooding expression on his face that made my heart give painful, quivering little jumps" (71).

While there is a decline in her conjugal relationship, her status in society rises day by day. It may imply at one level that her risen importance is inversely proportionate to the fall in the importance of her husband, creating a conflict between her achieved position and the ascribed position of Manu. People visit her for different purposes, which widen the gap between them. The financial ascendance of Saru, at the same time, renders Manu impotent. The only way he can regain that potency and masculinity is through sexual assault upon Sarita, which, for him, becomes an assertion of his manhood leading to a sort of abnormality at night, as he is a cheerful normal human being, a loving husband during day, turning into a rapist at night. It terrifies and humiliates Saru so much that she cannot even speak about them, even to him. "And each time it happened and I don't speak. Put another brick on the

wall of silence between us. May be one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death " (88)

Marital life is nothing but a queer combination of several forces acting upon two human beings in different capacities to fulfill the marital ambition and play a vital role in society. The given roles of two human beings do undergo a change both at the functional and psychological levels. This is precisely what happens to Saru when with her economic independence, reinforced with the fact that she earns more than Manu, she still feels stripped of her independence by virtue of being assigned to the job of a house wife, i.e., bringing up children and subserving the interest of her husband. Tired of both the duties, indoor and outdoors, she wants to leave the latter one: "Manu, I want to stop working. I want to give all up... my practice, the hospital, everything"(72). But Manu doesn't want her to leave job, as they cannot maintain the same standard with only his income: "On my salary? Come on, Saru, don't be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that?"(73).

This burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force imbalancing the marital balance that normally sustains conjugal relation. With this growing feeling of disenchantment and imbalance, separation becomes inevitable.

At this juncture of life, Saru hears the news of her mother's death and goes back to her parent's home, though emotionless. She does not feel at home at her parent's place where once she was born and brought up, everything looks strange to her in spite of the fact that there is no change in the setting:

" Inside here, though, there were no changes. The seven pairs of large stone slabs leading to the front door on which she played hopscotch as a child. The yard was bare as always" (11).

Though she comes back a totally changed woman, everything looks strange to her. Her father sounds strange while talking. The absence of affability in the house sets her pendulum rolling between the two houses: " As she drinks her tea ... too sweet and strong... he (father) sat gingerly on the edge of his chair like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. And that, I suppose, is what I really am. What gave me the idea I could come back?"(14)

She cannot say all that she wanted to. All this happens due largely to a guilt consciousness that she has developed.

She expects sympathy from her father but to no avail. Rather, her father, after listening to all the failures in her life adjusting with her husband, turns his back on her pretending to put rice on the stove. Under such circumstances, Saru feels that if it had been an arranged marriage, she would have got support from her parents. But now she is suffering from guilt consciousness. These feelings remind her of the fate of one of her friends:

"If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? She thought of a girl, the sister of a friend, who had come home on account of a disastrous marriage. She remembered the care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded, as if she was an invalid, a convalescent and the girl's face with its look of passive suffering. There had been only that there, nothing else, neither despairs nor shame. For the failure had not

been hers, but her parents, and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl" (199).

Acute confusion prevails upon her. She feels that she has done injustice to mother, husband and everybody else.

The wheel finally comes full circle Saru tries to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with a tiny hope of resettlement. The psychology of a woman placed in such a situation is given a physical revelation. She receives a letter from Manu of his arrival. The bitter emotions strengthen further. It is not the scorn for her husband and a sense of vengeance that gathers up a storm, but the sense of guilt that sweeps her off her feet. She reacts to every situation and becomes sensitive to every sound, all the time conscious of Manu reaching and knocking at the door. She asks her father not to open the door when Manu comes, perhaps believing that after being tired of knocking, Manu would depart. At the same time, she waits for someone to come and support her: "If only someone would tell her what to do, she would do it at once, without a second thought. It was strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life, she now had this great desire to let go. To put herself in another's hands." (88)

Taking into consideration the personal life of a character, one accepts the fact that every individual fantasizes about sex. But in the realm of every fantasy, there is the tinge of reality. This reality is at times gloomy and at times it leads towards the fulfillment of emotions. Saru grows and through the process of growing she inevitably comes across a number of novel situations which she could not have imagined, e.g. her entrance to the college life as a very simple, straightforward and studious girl, but later on, affected by the



company of her friends, coming out as a totally changed person; her becoming a woman and all the time being reminded by her mother of the same: "You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around"(55). And ultimately she starts hating her own womanhood: I can remember closing my eyes and praying... oh god, let it not happen to me. Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn't happen"(55).

The agonizing feelings bred by such growth are monstrous. With the physical growth, she, is, supposed to have passed one phase of life. The barriers of society spread their frightening tentacles over her. She feels abhorrent, but helpless: "A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother"(55).

She develops hatred towards her mother who always comes in the way of her progress. The writer has shown the gap in the mother-daughter relationship. In other words, it is a conflict between the old and the young: the tradition and the modernity. She is brought up in the traditional atmosphere but the education she receives makes her a changed person with a rebellious attitude towards tradition. As an educated young woman, she does not accept anything without reason. Her mother almost forces her to stay within the four walls of the house. She does not give her the permission to take admission to the medical college, but Saru does not even listen to her: "I'm not talking to you, ... you don't want me to have anything. You don't even want me to live"(128).



Here, a kind of hatred towards the mother is shown, as it is the mother who puts all the restriction on her daughter without considering the fact that the times have changed and the next generation is passing through a transitional period where the daughter is sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

Now, education invokes in her a consciousness, which was not present in the older generation. In many cases, as Maria Mies says:

“The non-conforming conduct of the women is not the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capacities are realized in their own lives”<sup>3</sup>

# CHAPTER 3

### 3.1 JAYA'S JOURNEY FROM CRISIS TO AFFIRMATION

*That Long Silence*, acclaimed masterpiece of feminist writing in Indo-Anglian fiction raises the status of Shashi Deshpande among the writers of the present-day; the novel highlights the image of the middle class woman sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

The title *That Long Silence* is taken from the pronouncement of Elizabeth Robins: "If I were a man who cared for the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy - the weight of the long silence of one half the world<sup>1</sup>". A woman has to go beyond the society-ordained roles of mother/ sister/ wife etc., she has to find out that she is! Emancipation of women physically and mentally is the goal of feminists. The title also suggests the intention of the novelist to explore the female psyche during the quest of the protagonist for 'self'. *That Long Silence* is the period of self-introspection of woman to explore her true identity.

Woman is not an appendage, she is a being; that too an autonomous being, and in the view of the writer, she has to find her own salvation. Deshpande never supported the radical view of 'Amazon Utopias', female realms where men have been relegated to secondary roles. The novelist moved a step ahead of the female dominated vision and portrayed the female psyche. The loneliness of a lady is no mental abnormality, but paved the way for the "New woman's quest for self-discovery".

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande delineates the delicate swings of mood, the see-saw moments of joy and despair, the fragments of feelings perceived and suppressed, the life of senses as well as the heart-wringing anguish of the narrator protagonist Jaya, a house wife and a failed writer. The

novel depicts the life of Jaya at the level of the silence and the unconscious. A sensitive and realistic dramatization of the married life of Jaya and her husband Mohan, it portrays an inquisitive critical appraisal to which the institution of marriage has been subjected to in recent years. It centers round the inner perception of the protagonist, a woman who is subtly drawn from inside, a woman who finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who really is. But could she?

The question, "who I am?" (24) Haunts her so obsessively that she fails to find herself. She is "An utter stranger, a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motives of her actions seemed impossible" (69). Hence her agonized cries- "I can't hope, I can't manage, I can't go on" (70). In such a stifling and suffocating domestic ambience and patriarchal set-up, she finds her female identity effaced. Her feminine dilemma is expressed in her vacillating state of mind: " I could and couldn't do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly (...) (83). Jaya is Suhasini and also "Seeta", the pseudonym she assumes to write columns about the plights of the middle-class housewife. Both "Suhasini" and "Seeta" are as Jaya says, " The many selves waiting to be discovered (...) each self-attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other"(69). Hence if life is "To be made possible" (193), she is to live neither as "Suhasini" or "Jaya", nor as "Seeta" or "Aunty-Kusum". She is to live but not in fragments.

Jaya when required to face a traumatic situation temporarily seeks shelter in neurosis that evades her responsibility as an adult individual for her without her being aware of it. Her suffering has a beneficial effect on her. It

initiates the process of self-discovery in her, which leads in the last analysis to her fresh perception of life. She emerges at the end of the ordeal as a woman with certain willingness to compromise with life's problems while earlier she showed a surprising lack of accommodation and expansiveness.

Jaya Kulkarni is an apparently satisfied housewife. Having married a responsible man, Mohan, and blessed with two children, Rahul and Rati, and a home and material comfort, she seems to have almost nothing to ask for in life. To achieve this stage of fulfillment as a woman Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refused to fit into her image as wife and mother. Two such most important aspects are: her writing career and her friendship with Kamat; which need clear understanding at the very outset.

Jaya has been a short-story writer of moderate success. Although Mohan takes pride in the fact of being the husband of a writer he strongly objects to her themes, which he suspects to have strong autobiographical overtones. On a particular occasion he says: "They will all know now, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us, they will think I am this kind of man, they will think I am this man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write these things (...) <sup>2</sup>

She however feels that she has related her experience only after transmuting it into something entirely different. But she has been "Scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage"(144). So in spite of her best judgment she gives up writing fiction and settles down to writing "Middles" in newspapers which pose no problem to any one.

The crisis started in Jaya's life when Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their well-settled, comfortable house to their old house in Dadar, Bombay, where they had stayed immediately after getting married when their financial condition was not good. They shift into their old apartment in order to escape the scene as Mohan has been caught in some business malpractice and an inquiry is in progress. Here, in a small old flat, Jaya gets out of touch with her daily schedule and becomes an introvert. She sits deep in contemplation, thinking of her childhood and tries to analyse herself. As Adele King in her review says: "Jaya finds her normal routine disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is"<sup>3</sup>

Not satisfied with her married life, Jaya recalls her past days, her upbringing, the environment in which she was brought up and the preaching that were thrust upon her when she was growing up e.g., she has been taught that "A husband is like a sheltering tree"<sup>4</sup>(32).

Jaya is representative of the urban, middle class women exposed to liberal western ideas. But she is unable to free herself entirely from the clutches of male chauvinist ideas. These ideas are a part and parcel of her culture, thrust upon her by those around her. Her aunt, Vanita Mami; for instance, counsels her just before her wedding: "Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree, keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies"(32). Vanita Mami's long suffering role of a martyred wife prompts Jaya at one time before marriage to think that may be, she too had been similarly counselled as bride, "If your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it. Take up a hobby instead, cats, may be, or your sister's children"(32). In spite of her flippant attitude towards Vanita Mami's advice,

however, Jaya proves that she is no different from her. When it comes to the question of a choice between her husband and family, and asserting herself as an independent individual, she chooses the former without hesitation. Although Jaya is influenced by modern thought of the West and other advanced countries and is herself a writer who had given up serious writing, and had taken up writing weekly column as Seeta, a plump, good humoured, pea brained but shrewd and devious woman, she still wants to compare herself with image of Sita, Draupadi, and other ideal mythological characters. She had always tried her best to keep balance between husband and wife: "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits off ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel" (7).

On the occasion of Revati's birthday, Jaya as well as her daughter, Rati, feel that Mohan loves his niece Revati more than his own daughter. But she does not say anything to Mohan as he only dismisses it as her "Writer's imagination" and nothing more. She always wishes to proceed as per husband's wish.

Generally, others define a woman's identity, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e. as a daughter, as wife, as a mother etc. The question "what a woman does" is never asked, but "whom she belongs to" is always considered she doesn't have an identity of her own. Subhash Chandra writes "No act to be done according to her own will by a young girl, a young woman, or even by an old woman, though in (their own) houses"<sup>5</sup>. Her name keeps changing according to the wishes of others. In *That Long Silence*, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini; Jaya, which means victory, is the name



given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini; the name given after her marriage which means "soft"; smiling, placid, motherly woman"(16). Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. The former symbolize revolt and the latter submission. The dreams of her childhood, to change the ascribed situation of woman resulting in achieving her goals, are shattered by environment, the surrounding, and above all by the society which imposes all sort of restrictions on women. She is absolutely helpless and is unable to do anything to improve her situation. Ultimately, she tries to adapt herself to the main current. She longs to be called an ideal wife. She revolts in silence. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and he calls it "strength": "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender."(36).

Coming to physical relationship between husband and wife, it is again the case of a dominating husband and suffering wife. Even if the husband hurts the wife, she remains silent. Jaya, too, has been cast in the same mould. She can't say "yes" when her husband asks her whether he has hurt her. She has to tolerate everything: "The emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit to being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him"(98).

In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, whether it is a love marriage or arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her. Whether the husband follows the right path or wrong one, she has to blindly follow in his footsteps. When Mohan is caught in an act of malpractice, Jaya had been content to follow the footsteps of the mythological role model of



Sita. At one time, she even tried to emulate the mythical Gandhari: "If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay; that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have the things we needed-decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, traveling I class"(61-62). Though she is unwillingly to follow the examples of Sita and Savitri, paradoxically, she is compelled by the situations and circumstances to follow the principle that "Both are yoked together, so better to go to the same direction, different directions will be painful"(10).

Jaya's husband, Mohan, always interprets things in relation to the effect it may have on the society. He unobtrusively likes to conform to the social norms even if they are strong. The success of Jaya's novel depicting the relationship between man and woman is weighed in relation to what society would think in future. So, he wants to makes Jaya also think like him and induces her not to deliberate on such themes that would endanger their marriage. Jaya, a representative of the typical Indian woman, in the present context, wants to mould herself, as her husband wills. But all these male-chauvinistic ideas are not her own, but have been thrust upon her by society in general and her father in particular. Her father made her think that she was different from others and hence, she could not cope with her hostel mates and kept herself aloof from other girls.

In her childhood, she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility. But after her marriage, she changes automatically, her anger withers away: "She was a child who used to get angry

very soon. But after her marriage she tolerated her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman 'unwomanly'." (83) When Kamat asks her why she has not expressed the anger of woman in her writings, her reply is: "Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?" (147).

When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she, at all times, tries her best to follow his advice. It is also throws light on her being closer to her father than to her mother. Even when her mother scolds her or questions her going out and returning home late, she complains against her mother to her father.

Social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man. Generally, a woman's identity tends to be defined by others. Due to her sensitive nature, Jaya is very particular about molding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied. In the very beginning of the novel, we see that she tries to reason out with her father as to why she shouldn't listen to the songs broadcast on the radio, but ultimately she keeps silent, suppressing her desire. Here, Deshpande has presented the theme of lack of communication. As she herself declares: "The themes of lack of communication may be over-familiar in Western fiction, but in extrovert India it is not much analyzed"<sup>6</sup>

In the novel under study, Shashi Deshpande presents the meanings of silence. As she herself puts it: "You learn a lot of tricks to get by in a relationship. Silence is one of them.... You never find a woman criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage the relationship."<sup>7</sup>

The novel is not an autobiography, except for certain parts dealing with the frustrations of an unsuccessful writer. Shashi Deshpande has presented an Indian woman as she is, in the India of the eighties and not as she should be.

Veena Sheshadri says in her review;

“Why has the author chosen a “heroine” who only succeeds in evoking waves of irritation in the reader? Perhaps it is because a competent writer like her is never satisfied unless she is tackling new challenges. Also, she believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be; and there must be thousands of self-centered women like Jaya, perennially griping about their fate, but unwilling to do anything that could result in their being tossed out of their comfortable ruts and into the big, bad world of reality, to fend for themselves”<sup>8</sup>

To make the story authentic and appealing, Deshpande has used the device of first-person narrative to ensure its credibility by making the protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman.

Jaya is basically a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband, Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs. The difference between their outlooks is so great that they fail, time and again, to understand each other. To Mohan, a woman sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot food is the real “strength” of a woman, but Jaya interprets it as nothing more than despair. The difference in their attitude is the main cause of their failure to understand each other.

A few of Jaya’s recollections turn morbid at times. For instance, is the description of Mohan’s mother’s death. Mohan’s sister Vimala describes the

scene graphically to her sister-in-law, Jaya something, which she was unable to discuss with her own brother:

"I was collecting my books when suddenly the thump of her hands as she beat out the *bhakries* came to a stop. I thought it was the usual \* pause between two *bhakries* and I didn't bother until I heard her screams. I didn't even imagine it was her screaming at first, it was not like her voice at all. It was a thin ugly voice that scared me to death. And then as I watched, she began hitting herself on the face. Her hands were all floury, and wet too, and her face soon became white and floury, soon there were red patches as she went on and on hurting herself... There was ash from the fireplace on her hair and all that flour on her face - her face was swollen by now. With her eyes caved in she looked like a dead person, her face was the face of a dead woman. A week later she died. She went to a midwife and tried to get herself aborted." (38).

Looking at the framed photographs of Mohan's parents in his brother's house, Jaya thinks, "The mother looks like any other woman of her time, staring blank-faced at the world, the huge *Kum-Kum* on her forehead blotting out everything in that face but the blessed woman who died with her husband yet living". (38). A generation later, Mohan's sister Vimala, too, who is the victim of ovarian tumour, bleeds herself to death in silence rather than inform her mother-in-law about it. She, of course, realizes that it would be of no use to do so. Her mother-in-law's response to her illness confirms this: "God knows what's wrong with her. She's been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her away if you want to. I never of women going to

hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don't have heavy periods. What a fuss. But these women who have never had any children are like that." (39) We may say that this is a typically conditioned response in a patriarchal system.

Jeeja, Jaya's maid-servant, is another typical example of the oppressed woman. She is battered about by her good-for-nothing drunken husband. Without a murmur of protest, she supports him and even provides him liquor with her hard-earned money. She bears no grudge against him even when he takes up another woman. She justifies it by saying, "God didn't give us any children. That was his misfortune As well as mine. How could I blame him for marrying again when I couldn't give him any children?" (52) After the death of her husband and his mistress, she willingly brings up their son, Rajaram, who is a chip of the old block. He drinks and beats up his wife, Tara. Jeeja, however, does not allow Tara to even abuse or curse her husband. She admonishes her saying, "Stop that, and don't forget, he keeps the *Kum-Kum* on your forehead. What is a woman without that?" (53). Subhash Chandra comments about Jeeja: "Manu could not have hoped for a more steadfast follower". (152). There is also the character of Jaya's grandmother, Ajji, who, once widowed, takes to an empty room, never to emerge again, and that of Mukta and Vanita Mami. Mukta is Jaya's immediate neighbor at her Dadar flat. She is widowed at a young age and lives with her parents and rebellious daughter, Nilima. She is the sort who will go out of the way, to help people. She is deeply pious and Jaya cannot help but wonder at the utter uselessness of such self-torture, "If it wasn't her Saturday' it was 'her Monday' or 'her Thursday'. Mukta had more days of fasts than days on which she could eat a

normal meal. Her self-mortification seemed to be the most positive thing about her. And yet her piety - surely it was that which promoted those fasts-seemed meaningless, since she had already forfeited the purpose of it, the purpose of all Hindu women's fasts-the avoidance of widowhood". (67). Jaya's barren Vanita Mami too would perform numerous *Pujas* and fasts in the hope of being blessed with a child, "But she had gone on with her fasts, her ritual circumambulations of the *Tulsi* plants, of the Peepul tree, even when their aim had gone beyond her reach, when her uterus had shrivelled and her ovaries atrophied"(67).

Due to differences in attitude, their marital life grows shaky and gloomy. It becomes more of a compromise than love, based on social fear rather than on mutual need of each other. The cause may be rooted in their choice of a partner. For example, from the very beginning, Mohan wanted a wife who was well educated and cultured and never a loving one. He made up his mind to get married to Jaya when he saw her speaking fluently, sounding so much like a girl whom he had seen speaking English fluently. He tells Jaya: "You know, Jaya, the first day I met you at your Kamukaku's house, you were talking to your brother, Dinkar, and somehow you sounded so much like that girl. I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you."(90)

In her stream of thoughts, Jaya, too, looks at her marital relations where there is no conversation left between them. This unhappiness is reflected not only in her conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion. Publishers reject her writings. And when, finally, Mohan angrily walks out of the house, she feels that she has failed in her duty as a wife. She recalls the tradition of act and retribution and compares



herself to Kusum: "An act and retribution they followed each other naturally and inevitably"(128). When Mohan leaves the house without informing her, she feels that her husband is neglecting her. Jaya has related herself to Kusum who had killed herself by jumping into the well, and had died not by drowning but of a broken neck, as there was no water in the well. Jaya was sure of her sanity as long as Kusum had lived, because if Kusum was mad, then Jaya must have been "normal". After Kusum's suicide, Jaya does not know any more who she is. Is she just Mohan's wife who had fragmented herself, who had cut off the bits that had refused to be Mohan's wife?

Is she like the sparrow in the bedtime story of wise sparrow and the foolish crow, which she had heard as a kid? That story goes like this. There was a foolish crow that built his house of dung, and a wise sparrow that built hers of wax... And when it rained, the house of wax stood firm, while the crow's house was washed away. And the poor crow, shivering and sodden, went to the sparrow's house and knocked on the door, calling, "Let me in, sister let me in". And the sparrow called back, "Wait a minute, my baby has just woken up". After a while, the crow knocked again, pleading, "Let me in, sister, let me in". And the sparrow said, "Wait a minute, I'm feeding the baby". And so the story goes on, the foolish credulous crow standing out there in rain, begging to be let in, while sister sparrow spins out her excuses... till finally she says, "Come in, you're all wet aren't you, poor fellow?" And she points to the pan on which she has just made the chapattis. Warm you there," She says, and the silly crow hops on to it and is burnt to death. Deshpande uses this story to paint vividly how the life of a woman like Jaya is. She says that their life's basis can be summarized as, " Stay home, look after your

babies, keep out of the rest of the world, and you're safe", For all outside appearances hers was a happy family, her husband was in a top position, they had two children-one boy and one girl - and she was yet another wife and mother whose life centered around her family and her home- nothing more.

She considers, like a rational individual, several options for dealing with the crisis such as suicide (11) and plain confession of the crime (31) and dismisses them all as impracticable and ultimately lets her psyche take its own measures to manage the crises. She lives several days in a traumatic state. Her thoughts go back and forth in time triggered by the slightest provocation but constantly return to the traumatic event. Traumatic neurosis is usually a result of an emotional shock wherein the subject feels his life threatened. Sometimes it acts as a precipitating factor and reveals an already existing neurotic structure. But mostly it manifests itself, in cases where the trauma is a decisive factor in itself, in the form of symptoms that incessantly strive to "blind" and re-enact the traumatic experience. On account of the low level of tolerance that Jaya is bestowed with, an earlier traumatic experience, that of her father Appa's sudden death, is precipitated by the present exceptionally intense stimulus. Both have shattered her equilibrium. Appa meant a great deal for her and his death was premature and sudden and it occurred at a crucial time in her life-when she was writing her school final examinations. His death rendered Jaya's family homeless and left her bereft of an emotional support. But at that time, although she took seriously ill, the comforting hand of her elder brother saved her from further psychic crisis. The present loss of her second home, which she has so carefully nurtured, apart from being of traumatic proportions, comes as a repetition of it. But now there is none whom



she can turn to, not even Kamat. She is required to grapple with the trauma all by herself even if it means an upset of her equilibrium and emotional poise and it must be said to her credit that she emerges triumphant, crowned with a new understanding of herself and the world, at the end.

The partial relaxation of the ego's control over the working of her psyche, during this period, gives her a changed perspective of the nature of things and human relationships. The most important of them is a free play given to the super-ego, which can be equally disastrous as the id when not properly managed by the ego. After experiencing the trauma Jaya seems to become at once excessively concerned about the moral side of what she has done so far what she should have done but did not. Fred observes in this regard:

"Ill-luck - that is, external frustration - so greatly enhances the power of the conscience in the *super-ego*. As long as things go well with a man, his conscience is lenient and lets the ego do all sorts of things; but when misfortune befalls him, he searches his soul, acknowledges his sinfulness, heightens the demands of his conscience, imposes abstinences on himself and punishes himself with penances"<sup>8</sup>

Indeed Jaya pours out, during her neurotic spell, her innermost thoughts and makes an unqualified confession of her "Sinful" acts which she never confided in Mohan again for fear of jeopardizing marital security. She feels freshly guilty about her clandestine fictional endeavours:

I had written even after that confrontation with him. (145)

It hadn't been Mohan's fault at all. And it had been just a coincidence, though it had helped, that just then Mohan had propelled me into that other kind of writing (middles) (148).

Her soul-searching, occasioned by the enforced leisure and coupled with a neurotics spell, also makes her dig into the long forgotten past and feel sorry for such things as the third child which she has not let live. With the help of her brother she happened to secretly terminate her third pregnancy. She now comes to think about it as her "Great act of treachery against Mohan" (130). As she probes deep into this significant event of her life the guilt feelings assume greater sharpness and poignancy.

But now, as if it had been waiting for its cue all these years, a shadowy figure in the wings, guilt sprang out at me. I thought of the unborn child with dread and piercing sorrow. I invested her- yes, it would have been a girl - with all the qualities I missed in Rahul and Rati (131).

Jaya is almost convinced at a point that the misfortune that had suddenly engulfed her family is entirely of her making- of her failure as a wife and mother (185).

Apart from the unusual activation of the punitive elements of the super-ego Jaya's psyche sets a wide variety of painful reactions in motion - something that is very much characteristic of traumatic neurosis - to naturalize and bind the flood of mobile instinctual energy. Ruminations on the traumatic event, insomnia and recurrent nightmares and dreams, feelings of detachment and disorientation, adverse somatic reaction and relative lack of control over one's action are the readily available tools the psychic apparatus which are pressed into service in Jaya's case. Every one of the defense strategies that

Jaya resorts to, emanates from, is structured around and finally returns to the single traumatic event of the sudden disintegration of her conjugal life.

Shashi Deshpande's use of dreams as a literary device, comparable to that of Graham Greene in their subtlety and pointedness, allows her to describe in symbolic and artistic terms the reality about the life of her heroines. The partial relaxation of the ego's control during sleep enables the dream work to symbolically present the unconscious motivation of the dreamer. Consciously Jaya tries to explain to herself hers and Mohan's fugitive status in terms of the slightly bizarre image of village women hiding only their heads when found easing themselves in the open. But in her nightmares and dreams her desolate helplessness comes more poignantly alive. Jaya's first nightmare, coming as it does at a crucial turning point in her neurotic reaction, reveals many conflicting tendencies within her. In the dream she sees Mohan and herself walking together. Soon she is left behind, and for some reason, has to pass through a house. A girl helps her into the house. Once she is in, she realizes with shock that she is alone, fearing that she will not be able to find Mohan any more. She is then led into a room where a number of girls are present. Although she feels that they sympathize with her none of them comes forward to help her. She feels ill and utterly helpless, and lies down like a corpse. The girls around her discuss her predicament in low tones. Not much later however, Mohan appears on the scene and asks her to hasten to a waiting taxi. But as she runs after him she realizes: That it is too late anyway, we will never be able to make it, we will never be able to get away, it is all my fault, all my fault (...)(86).

The dream presents, in a classic case of condensation and displacement, her entire marital experience, her present predicament and her unconscious wishes. The house she passes through is the marital edifice. She is led into it by society (symbolized here by the more acceptable and seemingly agreeable girl and later by a group of girls). Once, she is inside the house, no help comes forth. She has to make a home herself. She doesn't even understand Mohan fully. And then comes the catastrophe of the enquiry into the charges of corruption. Society, which she has thought to be on her side suddenly, turns hostile. Her degradations discussed by everyone. (In fact she literally shivers at the mention of the enquiry by her younger brother Ravi (111) and her neighbor Mukta's oblique references to her unusual long stay at the Dadar flat). She fervently wishes to get away from her present predicament. Tradition has it that a wife should seek her husband's help. And Mohan appears there with a taxi. But her belief in Mohan's ability of deliverance is not strong enough to blissfully give her into his care. She therefore thinks again that it is very late, the escape route is closed. She finds fault with herself because she is unable to do anything to help Mohan in his hour of need except neurotically rave and grieve.

While Jaya's first dream is a sort of wish fulfillment, her second dream, occurring much later, is expressive of her utter frustration. By now Mohan has deserted her and she has already borne the resultant additional psychic conflict. She experiences a stab of anguish whenever her servant-maid, Narayana, makes direct references to her unenviable plight. It is at that specific point that Jaya recounts her "Crazy recurrent dream".

I was looking for a toilet, I was desperate, I had to find one, and I'd disgrace myself if I didn't find one at once. And yes, there it was-the immense relief and then the over-powering shame as I realized I was in a public place surrounded by people staring at me steadily and silently (161).

Jaya and Mohan have hoped to escape publicity by moving to the Dadar flat. That such a thing is not possible is evidenced by Jaya's dream. She unconsciously perceives what is at the back of the mind of most of their acquaintances and it comes alive in the dream.

Feeling of detachment from the self, experience of split personality and a sense of disorientation too are expressive of neurotic conflict. The seeds of a split personality have always been present throughout her seventeen- year old married life. Her name was changed to Suhasini by her in-laws soon after marriage. Eversince, "Suhasini" has been her marital identity. Now that this identity is in crisis she feels disoriented. On a secret visit to her posh Churchgate house, to which her marital identity has been almost fixed, she sees her divided self-clearly.

And now nothing seemed to connect me to this place, nothing bridges the chasm between the prowling woman and the woman who had lived here. I was conscious of a faint chagrin at her disappearance. Wasn't I who had painfully, laboriously created her? Perhaps, for that very reason, she could not evade me entirely, and she appeared to me, only a faint wraith of herself, standing near this table, hand poised over a vase of flowers (168).

As her conflict reaches climacteric proportion she makes an even more frank admission of "A feeling of total disorientation"(177) and experiences detachment "from everything", even from her "own body"(177).

A relative lack of self-control over one's actions is again quite in keeping with the logic of neurotic suffering. Jaya's involuntary actions, "mad actions" in common parlance, are almost always precipitated by a specific incident in the present. But at the same time they can be easily traced back to the one great affliction, that of the shocking disintegration of her home the security of which she has uncritically taken for granted. The beginning of it is precipitated by Mohan's own disappearance. She experiences a fine quivering in her abdomen, which has always been for her prelude to a panic. She doesn't have Kamant now to assure her of her significance and sanity not the distant relative, mad Kusum, against whom to test her sanity. Inevitably therefore her "Sense of confusion" and turmoil meet her "with brutal force"(125).

I could feel myself gasping, drowning in the darkness, the wild, flailing, panic-stricken movements that I was making taking me lower and lower into the vortex (...).

Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, and don't let it escape...

I came floundering out of the depths, thinking-am I going crazy like Kusum? (125).

In spite of her categorical assertion of her sanity on the next page she indeed sacrifices some of it to relieve herself of the excruciating mental pain forced on her by circumstances. Apart from such apparently "crazy" actions as mumbling and speaking plain nonsense she experiences a brief spell of utter mental confusion as things move to a finale. This time it is triggered off by



her witnessing a cruel scene at the bus- stop. After the secret visit to the Churchgate house she waits for some time at the bus stop. It is raining heavily. She looks around and finds a very beautiful young girl smoking a reefer and two men roughly kneading her small breasts. Her imploration to stop the indecency evokes only a hearty laughter from the men. She feels so humiliated and helpless that she flees the scene as if pursued, in the pouring rain. In her unconscious she identifies the girl at the bus stop with her daughter Rati and the prospect of a similar future for Rati (a part of her secure home) drives her crazy. Somehow she returns home and deliriously goes on ringing the bell of her apartment and then bangs on the door. It is ultimately Mukta who takes the key from her bag and opens the door. All along Jaya keeps raving incoherently. She continues to be in delirium even the next day.

The impact of this specific incident coupled with the cumulative effect of the events of the past few days has been so deep on her that her psyche transfers some of its tension to her body, which reacts adversely under the pressure. She plunges headlong into high temperature. In fact she has always reacted in a similar manner whenever under great stress. She happened to fall dangerously ill following Appa's death too.

She had learnt at an early age that a husband is like a tree, a protection, and a security. Even if there was darkness and disaster in the outer world you could always close your door and windows, switch on the lights and the darkness recedes.

Perhaps Mohan is the victim of his own doing – a crow who has not built his life on sound moral principles. Is this what Deshpande means: “ let the male species shoulder the responsibilities and face the calamities of their

own creation ". This is not a real disaster for Jaya. Her real disaster is the discovery of her relationship, her marriage, "This whole absurd exercise we call life". Out of this quagmire of doubts, only Mohan could pull her out, Mohan's going away without informing her has frightened her. She remembers that Kusum, her alter ego, had escaped into madness and then death. It is this very fear that Jaya suffers from. She wants to cling only to Mohan. She does not want to be different from other common women. She realizes that without Mohan there is no life for her. Jaya feels that she can have her identity only if she has Mohan with her. Though her father always thought that she was very special and quite unique. If she rejects her wife-role and mother-role, what remains of her self? She realizes that without Mohan there is no life for her. There is no meaning to her life. She finds herself in the category of unwanted wives, deserted wives, and feels, she has nowhere to go.

Though brought up with a sense of her unique personality, at this stage in life she realizes that she does not wish to belong to this special category. Mohan's going away stuns her and awakens her to her real place in life. What place she could have except that of an unwanted woman? Life for her is to be lived fully in relationship with others. Not like Anita Desai's Monisha in *Voice In The City*, who never wishes to be related to persons or things, who is afraid of love, of relatedness, and thereby of losing her identity. Jaya feels that she can have her identity only if she has Mohan with her. She journeys a full circle, from searching her identity in loneliness to her relationship with Mohan and her children. But though it is a full circle, it is not the same point to which she returns.



On receiving Mohan's telegram she becomes herself: "I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife. I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible" (191).

She rejects even the image of two bullocks yoked together for she thinks that is condemning herself to a lifetime of disbelief. Now she has belief in herself-she can choose. The intense searching of the self has brought knowledge of life, which can't be lived in a vacuum. She realizes that the fault is her own. She had not spoken so far. She resolves that she will be now at the receiving end. In a sense, it is her liberated self. Deshpande invokes the *Bhagwad Geeta* and refers to Arjuna's knowledge imparted by Lord Krishna. It is for Arjun to make the choice. She must exercise her choice and give up using Prakrit language. For her, it is not "Women are victims" theory but women must assert and change themselves. One cannot remain where one is all one's life. One must change and hope that men shall change also. "It's possible, that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. (193).

Deshpande has portrayed the feel and tone of Indian life, of ordinary problems to everyday life. A life of complete inwardness, of a subjective indulgence is not for Jaya. Nor is complete conforming and total draining out of individuality the proper way out of the dilemma. One cannot live in fragments; the absolute self and the relatedness must join hands and hope for the fuller enjoyment of life.

The use of the first-person point of view provides Deshpande with the control that gives shape and significance to the intense agony that Jaya experiences. The protagonist accepts the reality of the situation, her existence in relation to her family. She shifts from past to present like sand in an hourglass, in time. She tries to fathom her real role in life. Her awareness of her individuality is essentially healthy though she becomes physically ill. Of course this makes her feel on the one hand a sort of entrapment and she desires to be free, on the other hand it makes her visualize her life bereft of her man. The emotional atmosphere permeates the whole novel and the mood becomes the medium. The personal past, the experiences of Kusum, her own mother and aunts, Mohan's mother and his sister and their silence in life pressurize her and mould her responses to the present situation. The idea of existing in an unrelated meaningless world, in a void is not acceptable to her. She seeks a re-orientation of her relationship and also Mohan's new awareness of his relationship to her. From the safety of the "toy-boat in a bath existence", she emerges through the tension between her two worlds as a determined strong-willed modern woman who is prepared to face life, accept her responsibilities squarely and not escape from or avoid them by committing suicide as some of Anita Desai's women do. Her resolution is like Arjuna's: "Fight back, with full knowledge." Deshpande's use of the myths of Seeta, Gandhari and Maitreyee sharply focuses the plight of the existence of Indian wife, at the same time revealing the Indian wife's awareness of this existence and her acceptance not of Seeta-role and Gandhari-role but of Arjuna's way of facing life.

Jaya reverts to the firm hold of marriage that has crushed her soul in the past. *That Long Silence* at last breaks with her story fully narrated and all her anguish articulated.

The process of self- discovery is illuminating and it is a cathartic experiment. It is a rebirth and resurrection of self. A new Jaya is born from out of an 'agonizing and despairing Jaya.' Self cannot be cut into pieces, a Jaya of Mohan or a Jaya of her own. She pledges to live a "Whole". She decided to stand by him life retaining all that did not fit in the straight jacket of "Womanhood" she decides to give her own answers to Mohan, not the answers expected by him. The ending of the narrative with "life has always to be made possible" (TLS193) is a note of hope and affirmation.

Shashi Deshpande is in the quest of creating a 'New Woman' out of her protagonists who belong to different culture, religious and linguistic backgrounds. The novelist is against the patriarchal establishments, which cripple the innate creativity of women. The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande enter into marriage with the hope that the marriage would provide them respect, security and status in the society but, unfortunately, they get disappointed and subsequently disillusioned. Deshpande celebrates the major exploration of her heroines by transcending the boundaries of the female gender; she creates initial revolvers but final compromisers like Jaya in *That Long Silence*. Her characters experience the gravitational pull of patriarchy and tradition.

In the same manner, Shashi Deshpande allows one of her women characters to exercise her reproductive right by aborting an unwanted foetus. In *That Long Silence*, Vimla, the sister of Mohan speaks of her mother's

unwanted pregnancies. She says "almost all my childhood, I remember her as being pregnant"(TLS 37). Because of the lack of information about safe methods of sex and facilities for safe abortion, Vimla's mother like the other women in India, continues to bear in silence a series of unwanted pregnancies. She already has six living children and has lost four or five babies. Unsafe conditions of abortion carried out by untrained quacks unleash a whole range of problems to women. Yet Vimla's mother "Went to a mid-wife and got herself aborted" (TLS38).

The 'new woman', despite the obstacles of poverty and the denial of formal education, identifies and uses her potential to emerge successful in life. The women characters of the novelist struggle to redefine their role and identity in the light of feminist theories. It is of paramount importance to see how each of these protagonists started to think and feel differently from other women and use their potentialities in a new perspective.

The concept and image of women has undergone a positive change. No society can ever progress without an active participation of women who are an integral part of human civilization in its over-all development. The present thesis attempts to interpret and record the reverberations of gender awareness revealed by Shashi Deshpande in her novel *That Long Silence*. She evinces keen interest in the empowerment of women in the multifaceted aspect of life. The women of Shashi Deshpande face formidable challenges to gain their rightful place in society. They are culture-specific and traditional. The major problems faced by Shashi Deshpande's women characters are the psychological conditioning and the gender discrimination, which determine

the adult personality of the female child. Her educated middle-class women achieve this feminist consciousness.

Some of the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande in their quest for identity exercise certain autonomy within marriage.

Shashi Deshpande wants to transform the society and she realizes the necessity for women's education and economic independence, which can eradicate poverty. She is concerned with the duties of a devoted wife's 'pativrata' and with these women's inner struggle to revolt against slavery. But her women come to the point of compromise and avoid all open fights. They practice non-violence and advocate that people should learn to negotiate disagreements and problems without fighting. This is seen at the end of *That Long Silence* where the protagonist, Jaya, decides to clarify the matter with her husband, on his return from his self-imposed exile. Shashi Deshpande brings out the guilt feelings from her protagonists and enables them to move in positive direction to maximize their potential.

Neither Jaya nor her creators Shashi Deshpande totally advocate western feminism. Still they are feminist-Indians in all respects, rooted to their conservative culture.

### 3.2 THE TRAUMA OF RAPE: MIRA AND KALPANA AS VICTIMS

In her fourth novel 'The Binding Vine' winner of the 'Sahitya Akademi Award' (1992) Deshpande attempts a bold theme hitherto untouched by Indian women novelists. She has deviated slightly here by introducing the rape victim within a marriage, and the consequents of agony of the victim - Mira.

Mira writes in her poem about the suffocation from which she is suffering.

"Huddle in my cocoon, a somnolent silk worm

Will I emerge a beauteous being?

Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?"(65)

The 'Binding Vine' is narrated by Urmi, a character drawn almost in the same vein as the protagonist of Deshpande's other novels. Shashi Deshpande's earlier heroines have maintained a long silence and are able to unshackle themselves only within a limited purview of their own lives. Unlike the other heroines, the heroine of this novel Urmila has a supportive family, loves her husband Kishore and is happy being married to him. Protest comes easily to her. She decides to fight another woman's battle.

Urmi is grieving over the death of her year old daughter Anu and in this condition she is highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitivity, which leads her to befriend Shakuntala, the mother of the rape victim. Urmi would never have associated herself with Shakuntala in the normal course of her life as she belonged to a different strata of society altogether. It is the same sensitivity that also makes her delve into the poems



of her long dead mother-in-law, Mira, and frantically try to understand the mind of Mira.

Urmi gets Mira's poem out of the trunk, which had sat for decades in the attic, gathering dust, and starts reading them. It is while reading these poems written by college going teenager Mira, by a Mira who was married off to a man whom she could not love, that Urmi realizes the various facts of pain that many a woman has to bear very often silently, mostly without having any options.

The healing process, which begins by reading Mira's poems, continues when Urmi accidentally meets Shakutai in the hospital where Vanna works as a medical social worker. Shakutai's eldest daughter Kalpana has been brought to the hospital after she was brutally beaten up and raped. Urmi feels compelled to help Shakutai, to listen on her, to keep her company. During the long wait in which Kalpana lies in coma, Urmi makes a bold, modern, and very humanistic statement, in that she tries to convince Shakutai that it was not Kalpana who did anything wrong, it is not that she invited trouble upon herself by dressing up, by painting her lips and nails, but it is Kalpana who is terribly wronged. For a long time Urmi herself does not understand her need to come and sit with Shakutai, whose world is so very different from her own.

The novel opens with Urmila trying to cope with the death of her daughter and the efforts of her friend and sister-in-law, Vanna, her brother Amrut and Inni, her mother to help her back to normalcy. Vanna's pathetic attempts to remind Urmi of the great courage she had displayed in the incidents of their childhood are all dismissed by Urmi, who feels that they are too petty to be compared to her grief now. She, in fact, wants to cling on to her

grief and feels that she can't betray her daughter's memory by trying to blot her out of her mind commenting on her masochistic attitude, S. Indira writes:

"Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds on to it as she believes that to let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss."<sup>9</sup>

It is in this state that Urmi meets Shakuntala, the mother of the rape victim. Kalpana on her visit to the hospital where Vanna works. Earlier the mother assumes that her daughter, who is now lying unconscious, has been injured in a car accident. On examination, the doctor informs her that she has been raped, in the process of which she is so badly injured that she is lying like vegetable neither dead nor alive. The mother's reaction to this news is quite predictable. She tells Vanna hysterically, "It's not true, and you people are trying to blackmail my daughter's name".<sup>10</sup> Later on, catching a hint of the conversation between Vanna and Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge, she recoils in fear against the word, 'report' she cries: "No, no, no. Tell him, tai, its not true, don't tell anyone. I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girl, we're decent people, doctor," she turns to him, "don't tell the police." (58)

Urmi fights in favour of the young rape victim Kalpana. It comes as shocking revelation to Urmila that everyone wants to hush up the rape case and the general reaction to it is "okay, she was raped. But publicizing it isn't going to any one good. It's going to mean trouble for everyone, the girl, her



family.”(88-89). Even the police officer dealing with the case is of the same opinion. According to him:

“What difference would it make whether the victim died of an accident or rape. We don’t like rape cases – they are messy and troublesome, never straightforward. But forget that and think of the girl and her family. Do you think it will do them any good to have it known the girl was raped? She’s unmarried, people are bound to talk, and her name would be smeared.” (88)

Even the mother of the victim does not want the case to be registered for she feels that it would blacken her daughter’s name and the fear as to who would marry her second daughter? They don’t want the rapist to be punished; instead they blame the girl for the beastly act. Kalpana’s mother says: “If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they’ll leave you alone.... It’s all her fault”(146-47). Kalpana’s mother also says Urmil that we have to keep our places, we can never step out. There are always people waiting to throw stone at us, our own people first of all. I warn Kalpana but she never listen me. “I am not afraid any one,” she used to say. That’s why this happen to her. Kalpana’s mother concludes by saying: “Women must know fear,”(148). But Urmila, unlike other women, does not want the man who has wronged Kalpana to get away easily.

In spite of the fact that Kalpana’s mother wishes for the death of her daughter, Urmila decided to fight her case.

The mother’s reaction, no doubt, is a reflection of the society we live, in, governed by age-old patriarchal norms. There is a strict code of conduct to be followed by girls regarding their dress, speech and behavior in order not to

attract the attention of men. A girl is advised at every step to avoid behaving like a male and to establish her feminine identity. A lot of importance is attached to the way she carries herself, the way she sits, stands, talks and interacts with others. Taking long strides denotes masculinity, and so a girl is told to walk with soft steps, so soft that they are barely audible to the others. It is considered sacrilege for a girl to dress or move in such a way so as to bring the contours of her body into greater prominence and attract people's attention.

If a girl is raped, then, according to the rules laid down by society, she is considered to be as much at fault as the rapist, if not more. Perhaps, there can be no greater injustice heaped on women than this. Worse still, the police whose duty to bring the culprit to book, prefer to record it as an accident as in the case of Kalpana. Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge of the case, protests in outrage at the case being reported as an accident pointing out to the obvious signs of rape on the badly mauled Kalpana, he tells Urmi:

"What about the injuries, I asked him? I'd examined the girl damn it," Bhaskar says angrily. "You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her thighs- he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips bitten and chewed. Surely, I asked, no vehicle could have passed over her lips leaving teeth marks?"(8)

In spite of all her sympathies, Urmi is unable to do anything for Kalpana. She remains a mute spectator until the hospital authorities decide to shift her to a suburban hospital as beds are in much demand in the crowded hospital. Urmi then decides to take the matter to the press so that Kalpana may

get justice. Urmi's crusade for Kalpana doesn't receive the approval of either Vanna or Urmi's mother. Nevertheless, Urmi pursues the case. Eventually, the case reopened and the identity of the rapist is revealed only in the end. However, a perpetuation of the tragedy can't be avoided as the case draws to a close. The rapist is discovered to be Shakutai's sister Sulu's husband, who, it is later, revealed, had always, lusted after Kalpana.

Like Kalpana Mira is also raped but the difference is that Mira is raped by her own husband after marriage by a brutal man. It is almost an entirely untouched subject of marital rape – hitherto considered a taboo subject by other Indian writers in English. But Shashi Deshpande has touched this subject in her novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, in a different context. In *The Binding Vine*, however, Deshpande describes the obsession of a man with his wife and her intense dislike for physical intimacy with him, which finds voice in a series of poems discovered by the protagonist Urmi long after her death.

Many years after her marriage, Urmi is given an old trunk full of books and other odds and ends belonging to her long dead mother-in-law, Mira, by her husband's step-mother, who is referred to as Akka, Akka also the mother of her friend Vanna. While handing over the trunk to her, Akka tells her how Urmi's father-in-law had been attracted to Mira, a college student, and how he had pursued and married her. Perusing the voluminous pile of writing left behind by the young Mira, Urmi fathoms the extent of forced sexual activity Mira was subjected to by her husband. The trunk is full of school notebooks, which Mira had used as diaries, scribbling pads, untidy bundles of paper, a file and an envelope full of photographs. Reading through the cryptic poems and entries in her diary, Urmi is able to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl

who was condemned to suffer in an incompatible marriage. After a careful study she is able to decipher the essence of the thoughts, which Mira had, perhaps, tried to put down on paper. From the book of poems presented to Mira by her father, it is evident to Urmi that her father was proud of her talent. Mira's photographs and writings resurrect in Urmi's mind an image of a vivacious and intelligent young girl. Her desire to be a poet and her inhibitions about expressing it aloud, her fear of being laughed at, are all obvious in her poems.

Her innermost feeling find expression in her poems written in the vernacular, Kannada.

Mira, perhaps, symbolizes the plight of countless women who face the same situation but are unable to voice their suffering. The invasion of one's body even though sanctified by marriage, can be as traumatic as rape. We come across a similar situation in Shashi Deshpande's short story "Intrusion" which describes the experiences of a honeymooning couple. It is a highly sensitive story where the husband imposes himself on his yet unprepared wife. Their experiences evocatively bring out the humiliation experienced by the protagonist who feels her crass and insensitive husband has violated her body. Even Kamala Das bemoans the lack of love and romance in her marriage life.

A husband imposing himself on his wife is, however, never publicized at least among the Indians where the Puranas dictate that it is a wife's duty to please her husband in bed. Tradition demands that a perfect wife should possess the following qualities:

Karyesi Dasi

Karyeshu Mantri

Roopecha Laxmi

Kshmaya Daridri

Bhuktesu Mata

Shayanesu Vesnya

Shatkarna Yukta

Kuladharma Patni

Loosely translated, these lines means that a wife should serve her husband like slave, give him proper advice, look as beautiful as goddess Laxmi, forgive all his sins however terrible they may be, feed him like a mother, and serve him like a prostitute in bed. These lines, often quoted as advice to wives, clearly show the injustice meted out to women who are expected to give top priority to their husband's pleasure.

It is no wonder, then, that Urmi's mother-in-law, Mira, had to put up in silence with the violation of the body. Her thoughts however, are recorded as poems for posterity. Urmi careful translation of the Kannada poems into English reveals the pathetic condition of Mira. One poem particularly brings home her tragic despair:

"But tell me friend,

did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels

round her finger and tremble,

fearing the coming of the dark-clouded engulfing night. (66)

Going through Mira's diary, Urmi is convinced that she had written from her personal experience. "She observes that it runs through all her writing a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion for the man she married"(63). To prove her

point, Urmi narrates a passage where Mira had clearly put down on paper, the relationship she shared with her husband and her feelings or lack of them for him:

Talk, he says to me, why don't you say something, why don't you speak to me? What shall I talk about? I ask him stupidly. "What did you do today, where did you go, what have you been thinking about all evening?" and so he goes on, dragging my day, my whole self out of me. But I have my defenses; I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings. He knows what I'm doing and he gets angry with me. I don't mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, and it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, he holds me close, he begins to babble. And so it begins. "Please," he says, "please, I Love You". And over and over again until he has done. "I love you." Love: How I hate the word. If this is love, it is terrible thing. I have learnt to say "no" at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can't he leave me alone? (67).

Urmi is able to feel her pain and anguish years later and connects her sorrow to that of Shakutai's who also has the same thing to say, "Why does this have happen to me?" (67). Urmi alleviates her grief by discovering and empathizing with the sorrow of these women. Since the beginning of time, it had always been taken for granted that marriage provided a means for a man to satisfy his sexual urge and to help in the task of procreation, and that woman was only a tool to be used towards that end. While Deshpande's Mira represents women who are victims of marital rape, Anita Desai's Maya, in



*Cry, The Peacock*, represents women whose husbands remain insensitive to their desires. Just as Mira silently subjects herself to nightly assaults of her husband, Maya turns a psychological wreck unable to get any solace from her unresponsive husband.

Husbands and wives are thus bound in an institution, which is being called marriage. Simone de Beauvoir observes:

"Marriage is obscene in principle insofar as it transforms into right and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore degrading character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their general aspect as bodies, not as persons."<sup>11</sup>

Going by this definition by Beauvoir, it would be no exaggeration to say that most Indian marriages are 'obscene; conducted as they are, taking caste, creed, community, financial and social status and everything else except the feelings of the prospective bride and groom into consideration. Countless generations of women have been victims of loveless marriages and several generations will continue to be so if society chooses to ignore the feelings of women.

Though the novel, *The Binding Vine*, essentially revolves around the individual tragedies of Urmi, Mira and Kalpana, Deshpande hints at the raw deal faced by most women at different levels-whether it is women from chawls like Shakutai and Sulu, or the urban, educated women like Urmi's mother, Inni, her friend Vanna and her mother-in-law, like *Akka*.

Mira had no room of her own and had never expected any recognition of her poetry. She is lonely and anguished and puts her desires into her diary

which she had locked in an old trunk for no body else to see for they would call her "mad" for being entranced by the seven colours in a single white ray of light passed through a prism.

Deshpande highlights the injustice meted out to women in the literary world where men dominate. This is not because women are not talented, but because men are considered creatively superior to women. Mira's diary reveals that Venu, a poet, whom she idolized, was contemptuous of her writing. When she gave him some poems of hers to read, he replied: "why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men" (127).



### 3.3 FEMALE BONDING AND SOME SOLUTIONS

*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the earlier novels of Deshpande. The step forward, achieved in this novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one. Urmila draws society's attention to the plight of rape victim and is determined to get Mira's poems published. This is a positive development in the protagonist, for Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fighting their own battles.

In this novel Urmila the protagonist of Deshpande's novel is suffering from the death of her daughter Anu so a kind of apathy arouses in her heart towards Sakutai who is the mother of rape victim and towards Mira Urmila's mother-in-law.

In the novel, one woman helps another less fortunate woman, as Vanna helps Urmila to come out from the death of her daughter, And Urmila helps Mira and Shakutai. It comes as a shocking revelation to Urmila that everybody wants to hush up the rape case and the general reaction to it is "okay, she was raped. But publicizing it isn't going to do anyone good. It's going to mean trouble for everyone, the girl, her family." (88-89) Not only the police officers, but also her mother's reaction was very strange. The same Shakutai; however, condemns her for the very things for which she praised her earlier:

"And I have to listen to such words because of the girl. She's shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me – what could I do? She was so self-willed. Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should

have seen her walking out, head in the air caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila, all her fault. (14)

Urmi, however, is unable to see the point in blaming Kalpana. She is outraged that the rapist will be allowed to get away scot-free, if the case is not registered as a rape. She tries to reason with Shakutai: "She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It's not her fault, no, not her fault at all" (147). She is unable to convince Shakutai, who keeps saying, "But sometimes, I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death"(147), Shakutai, who keeps meandering between praising her daughter and criticizing her.

In spite of all her sympathies, Urmi is unable to do anything for Kalpana. She remains a mute spectator until the hospital authorities decide to shift her to a suburban hospital as beds are in much demand in the crowded hospital. Urmi then decides to take the matter to the press so that Kalpana may get justice. Eventually, the case is responded and the identity of the rapist is revealed only in the end.

Shashi Deshpande also deals with the problem of rape in marriage. Mira, Urmila's mother-in-law had died in childbirth. She had four years of loveless marriage leading to her "dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical revulsion from the man she marries". (63) Sex, to her, had become like "the sting of a scorpion". Her husband had been least understanding and she could never speak to him of her wants. Leaving her with no other option but to express her desire in her poems, which she secretly wrote in her diary, Urmila wants to expose the evils of society and encourages women to express themselves strongly.

According to Urmila marriage, for women, is a necessity. Marriage is important because "You are safe from other men". Even Kalpana's mother who is suffering from constant poverty and the ill-treatment meted out to her by her drunken husband feels the same and wants to push her daughter into this kind of savagery. Urmila's satisfactory marriage gives her the courage to fight for the cause of another woman who has not been that lucky and also to reject Bhasker's overtures to her.

Difference in the attitude towards women as compared to that of men is another theme, which is dealt with in *The Binding Vine*. Urmila's mother has never been a doting mother for she sends Urmila away to her grandparents' house leaving her alone with Amurut, Urmila's brother. At least this is what Urmila has always felt. Added to this is the fact the daughters do not want to be like their mothers. As Mira expresses her desire: "to make myself in your image was never the goal I sought". (124). She had never wanted to repeat her mother's history although she had no idea as to the happiness or unhappiness of her mother. Kalpana too does not want to live like her mother; she wants to choose her own life. Urmila has been luckier than these women for she was born in a family where she has had a choice to plan for herself and her daughter. She would not let anything fetter her daughter, not even her love and let her climb high and do whatever she would want to do. This is the reason why she mourns the death of her infant daughter and whereas Shakuntala, Kalpana's mother, curses the birth of her daughter and wishes her dead. Thus we see that, Urmila's desire to help a less fortunate woman, Kalpana, a rape victim and to get Mira's poems published is a

positive development of a woman from the earlier novels of Shashi  
Deshpande.

## Notes and references

- <sup>1</sup> R.K.Dhawan, Indian writing in English- women novelists. New Delhi; Prestige Books, 1991.
- <sup>2</sup> Shashi Deshpande THAT LONG SILENCE (New Delhi: Penguin books, 1989)  
143 – 44. Parenthetical page references in the text are to this edition.
- <sup>3</sup> Adele King, “Effective Portrait” Debonair, June 1988 p.97.
- <sup>4</sup> Shashi Deshpande, THAT LONG SILENCE (London: Virgo press, 1988)
- <sup>5</sup> Manu, The ordinances of Manu, trans. From Sanskrit, Arthur Coke Burnell, ed. Adverd W Hopkins, second edition, (1884 : rpt. New Delhi : oriental books, 1971), p. 1
- <sup>6</sup> John Cunningham, “Indian Writer’s Block”, The Indian past, March 6, 1988.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Veena Sheshadri, “That Long Silence”, literature Alive.II, I (1988), P.94.
- <sup>9</sup> S. Indira, “A Bond or Burden ?” A study of Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine, Indian women novelists ed. R.K.Dhawan ( New Delhi : prestige 1995), set III, volume 622.
- <sup>11</sup> Shashi Deshpande, The Binding Vine (New Delhi : penguin India, 1992), 58.
- <sup>12</sup> Simone De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H.M.Parshley (Harmonds Worth : penguin), 463.

# CHAPTER 4

#### 4.1 SUMPI'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND SELF AWARENESS

In her recently published book, *A Matter of Time*, Shashi Deshpande, scales new heights. Very Indian in its foundation, the core of the book is built around the question of what a man does when he is disenchanted with the material world. One of the paths such people could take was paved ages ago – nobody knows when actually- when sage Yajnavalkya told his wife, “Maitreyi, verily I am about to go forth from this state (of householder)”-as told in the Brihadarnyaka Upanishad. Such going forth has nothing to do with the wife, her beauty, her youth, or any similar quality of her wifeliness. It also has nothing to do with Vishwas, trust (or the lack of it) a husband/wife has in the other. The need springs from the inside, from recognizing the effervescence of the world around oneself. According to the Brihadarnyaka Upanishad, Maitreyi on hearing that declaration of her husband, discussed with him the reasons for his going away, and argued with him whether that path was also not hers to take. The maiteryi of Brihadarnyaka Upanishad was free to renounce the world, and to go on a spiritual quest of her own. That special moment of Maitreyi's life forms the ground on which Shashi Deshpande builds her book.

Shashi Deshpande, who has carved a niche for herself in articulating the bitterness and desolation of her women characters in her novels, enters for the first time into a broader arena and grapples with the complex theme of alienation in her novel. Also, for the first time in her career, Deshpande makes a man the protagonist of the novel. But, this does not mean that the novelist totally shifted her focus. A close study of the novel reveals that Deshpande is



deeply concerned as usual with the traumas suffered by women in a middle class family in India. No doubt, the novel begins in a manner, which is deceptively similar to her earlier novels and follows almost the same pattern, but there is something intrinsically different in its theme and presentation.

Shashi Dehpande's *A Matter Of Time* particularly deals with the theme of the quest for female identity. The complexities of man-woman relationship specially in the context of marriage, the trauma of a disturbed adolescence, the attempt to break traditional moulds in which women are trapped, sexual discrimination, the rejection of the dependency syndrome and introspection are some of the concerns which give the novel a feminist bent.

In *A Matter Of Time*, Deshpande gives an honest account of the abrupt disintegration of Gopal's happy family and the diverse reactions of all the people concerned. Without any warning, Gopal one day announces to his wife that he is leaving the house for good, Sumi, his wife of twenty years, and their teenaged daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema are caught totally unawares. Sumi retreats into a shocked silence while eighteen-year-old Aru tries bitterly to search for her own reasons for this calamity.

Deshpande, who is an acknowledged master at expressing the anguish and frustrations of women, gives a true-to-life saga of the trauma faced by Sumi. The support of her immediate family-her parents, sister and cousins-comforts her to some extent, cushioning her against the cruelties of life. Unlike the general idea of a deserted wife, Sumi does not crumble to pieces at the pain and humiliation inflicted on her. As soon as she recovers from shock, she picks up the threads of her life and tries to readjust her lifestyle to suit the situation. She moves with her children, into her parents' house and helps her

children to get on with their lives as before. This monstrous tragedy, so undeserving as we are made to understand, leaves Sumi seemingly unperturbed. But beneath her apparent stoicism is pathos left for the reader to decipher.

Sumi and Gopal's is not the ordinary arranged marriage. Gopal's frequent recapitulations allow the reader to share in their discovery of each other. Their joyous intimacy leaves one in no doubt of their compatibility-physical as well as mental. Recounting the rapture of their first physical union, Gopal thinks: "And I knew then that it was for this, this losing yourself in another human being, that men give up their dreams of freedom"<sup>1</sup>. Their separation, therefore, is all the more poignant. Permi, Sumi's sister, is filled with a rage "At their carelessness in throwing away what they had, uncaring, it seems to her, of the value of what they have discarded." (136).

It is evident that there are no obvious reasons for Gopal walking out on his family. This is clearly established by the pathetic probing by Kalyani, Sumi's mother, who takes it upon herself to plead with her son-in-law to return home. Gopal reassures her that Sumi is not to be blamed for his decision, but does not offer any other convincing reason. Sumi's sister's attempt to elicit a reply from her brother-in-law also proves to be futile. On probing, Permi discovers from Aru and Charu that their father had been humiliated by his students in college and had later resigned from his job. However, this does not seem to be a sufficiently concrete reason for his resolution. At times, it appears that even Gopal is not aware of the reasons for this momentous decision he has taken.

Vague references to his past by Gopal reveal that his childhood has not been normal. The fact that his father had married his brother's widow, and he was born of that union proves to be quite unsettling for Gopal. His adolescent mind draws up several possible reasons for this marriage. And, at one time, struggling with an inner conflict, he even draws a parallel from Hamlet's predicament:

"It was when I read Hamlet, fortunately much later, that the most terrible version of my parent's story entered my mind. Just that once, though, for I slammed the door on it immediately. In this story my father became a man succumbing to his passion for his brother's wife, the woman compliant, a pregnancy and a child to come and then after the husband's convenient death (no, I couldn't, I just couldn't make father poison his brother) a marriage of convenience. (43).

He is never able to relate to his father always thinking of him as his mother's guilt partner. Later, his parent's gruesome death leaves a void in his life. But, more than that, it is the realization, that his sister, Sudha, and he did not share the same father, which shattered his equilibrium. As he later reflects, "that was a betrayal that cut away the foundations of my life". (52). It is obvious, therefore, that Gopal has long been nurturing a sense of loneliness and desolation as evident from his ruminations:

"Emptiness, I realized then, is always waiting for us. The nightmare we most dread, of waking up among total strangers, is one we can never escape. And so it's a lie, it means nothing, it's just deceiving ourselves when we say we are not alone. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a

masquerade some day, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. (52)

This line of thinking, which is similar to Sartrean existentialism, progresses towards the more indianised concept of renunciation in the later stages of Gopal's life. The Hindu tradition identifies four stages in man's life: *Bramhacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha*, *Sanyasa*. Having experienced *Bramhacharya* and *Grihasha* (bachelorhood and the duties of a householder), respectively, Gopal now moves forward to an experience *Vanaprastha* (the relinquishing of the duties of a householder) that is only a step away from *Sanyasa* (total renunciation).

Apart from a few random recollections of his childhood, Deshpande does not throw any further light on the reasons for Gopal's renunciation. It is left to the readers to surmise why Gopal chooses to relinquish his duties as a householder. It is not even clear if he has achieved a solution to his problems or has arrived at a greater understanding of himself. It is, however, quite apparent that he has relished every moment of his life as a husband and father. It is a paradox, which shrouds the reasons for his behaviour in ambivalence and mystery.

This aspect of the novel, dealing with Gopal's renunciation, finds a parallel in Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* where the protagonist, like his namesake Gautama Buddha, abandons his home and family to find a solution to the "enigma of human loneliness and discontent"<sup>2</sup>. The protagonist, Siddhartha, who is endowed with all virtues, goes through various stages in the life to emerge in a final state of peace and holiness. On the road to his destination, nevertheless, he has tasted the enjoyment of being a mendicant

wanderer, the rapture of being a student/consort to a courtesan and the pleasure of being a wealthy man of business. Eventually, sickened by lust and other worldly pleasures, he finds his peace as a companion to a humble ferryman.

For Deshpande's Gopal, however, the dilemma continues and desertion upsets a number of peripheral characters, apart from the significant character of his wife, Sumi, which again compels the author to stray back into her forte of giving voice to the discontent and frustration of women. Sumi copes quite admirably with the humiliation and disgrace of being a deserted wife. She does not rave and rant but surrounds herself with a deathlike silence. Her very silence, however, conveys her pain more effectively than words can. In a manner quite similar to that of her counterparts, Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmi, in Deshpande's earlier novels, Sumi reveals an independent nature. Sumi is proud and defiant. It is clear that she does not want anyone's pity. The fact that she realizes, that life must go on and she must be strong for the sake of her daughter, is reiterated throughout the novel. Even Aru, who had thought that her mother was indifferent to Gopal's desertion, realizes after Sumi's death: "I thought she didn't care about what papa did, I thought she was uncaring, indifferent, I said angry words to her but I know now that was not true."<sup>3</sup> (240)

The novel revolves around four generations of women- Manorama, who is now dead but whose absent presence can be felt through her portrait, Kalyani, Sumi, and Aru. When Gopal walks out on her for reasons, which he himself cannot understand, Sumi returns with her three daughters Aru, Charu and Seema to shelter in the Big House where her parents Kalyani and Sripathi live in a strangely oppressive silence. They have not spoken to each other for

thirty-five years. There is a distinct parallel between Sripathi's desertion of Kalyani and Gopal's desertion of Sumi. But what is significant is that without the men the women come to their own and show the potential to shed the dependency syndrome. But Gopal's desertion is not just a tragedy. For Sumi and her daughters it is also a shame and disgrace. There is a social stigma that, they now have to bear. Despite the fact that others think that she takes Gopal's desertion as a matter of fact Sumi undergoes her own kind of suffering: "It takes time to get used to sharing your life with another person, now I have got used to being alone." (23)

There is a ruthlessness with which she makes the girls discard things when they vacate their house and decide to live permanently in the Big House. She looks hollow-eyed and drawn after their last night in their own house but Aru finds her mother looking so bright and normal in the morning after her bath, that she cannot but think: "Perhaps things will work out, may be we will be able to go on, even if we can't go back" (30).

Gopal evokes the reader's pity for bringing this distress on himself and his family. His description as a loving husband and gentle and caring father dissuade us from laying the blame squarely on his shoulders. According to Subhash K. Jha, "Gopal is not our average cardboard cad but a distressed guilt-ridden husband and after father baffled by his own sudden withdrawal from active domesticity"<sup>4</sup>. Episode from history and mythology bear witness to men who were venerated for their selflessness while no thought was given to the silent and suffering and martyrdom of their wives. Lakshmana's steadfastness and devotion has no parallel in Indian mythology, while Siddhartha is hailed for spurning the luxury and comfort of princely life in

pursuit of knowledge. Their respective spouses Urmila and Yashodhara, however, remain shadowy figures in the background, doomed to live a life of anonymity and insignificance. While Gopal is not idolized, he is not reproached either for shirking his responsibilities as a husband and father. On the other hand, Sumi is made to suffer the disapproving comments of women like Shanker's mother: "When are you going back to your husband?" the old woman ask abruptly.

"You should be with him. Look at his state! It's all right to stay with your parents for a while, but that's not your home. When my daughters come home, I don't let them stay long. Go back to your husband, he's a good man. If you've done wrong, he'll forgive you. And if he has- women shouldn't have pride."(161).

Centuries may separate us from the mythical fingers of yore, but even today a women's worth is measured only through her marital status. This is graphically illustrated in the saga of the marriage of Sumi's parents, Kalyani and Shripati.

Sumi's decision to learn to ride the scooter is her first step towards a more independent existence. Aru too tries to be "the man of the family". She insists on taking her mother to the dentist and tries to "fill the blank Gopal has left". For a while Aru and Kalyani do not get along very well but very soon Aru realizes that there is something strange in the relationship between her grandparents "Why does Baba never come down? Why doesn't he ever speak to Kalyani? She is his wife isn't she? And why is she so frightened of him? Poor Amma, Sumi says. But why? (39).



Sumi tries to persuade Aru to ignore the queer relationship between her grandparents just as she tries to make her forget what Gopal has done:

“Do you want to punish him, Aru? I don't. I'm not interested. I just want to get on with my life. Let him go Aru, just let him go. This is not good for you. (61).

Kalyani and Goda (Kalyani's cousin sister) worry about the fact that Sumi has lost weight but Sumi, “feels that what she has shed is unwanted matter; what now remains is the essential. Her fine boned body (...) feels full of energy” (70). It is as if Sumi has embarked on a journey. Actually Sumi knows why Gopal left her. She always knew that Gopal who always had a fear of commitment and family ties had the potential to walk out on her and the children. So, with all the trauma of being a deserted wife, Sumi is more interested in getting on with her life and finding a meaningful existence. She does not mope or wallow in self-pity. She is willing to let Gopal go his own way just as she must find her own path. Now back in the Big House, she feels like a “parasite” and is keen to get a job. She cannot help but observe that being a daughter is a disadvantage: “She saw it then, the adoration of the male child. It must have been this way in the stable in Bethlehem, in Nanda's house on the banks of the Yamuna in Gokul. The male child belongs (...) (71).

It is when Sumi is out of house hunting and happens to pass the house of the student at whose press Gopal is working and with whom he is living, that she meets Gopal. It is here that in a flash she realizes that Gopal and she must now move on alone and she reconciles herself to their separation:

“We can never be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he

left us. But he has gone on living. His life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged. They now move more separately, two different streams". (85).

Sumi, in time, enters a world of creative writing. Her first attempt, a play entitled 'The Gardener's Son' is a success. This gives her the courage to deal with more daring themes like female sexuality. Sumi also looks at the mythical figure of Surpanakha from a new angle. She is unable to appreciate Rama and Lakshmana's treatment of Surpanakha:

"She's as ugly as Surpanakha," she has heard Kalyani say. And she has been thinking since then of this demon sister of king Ravana, who fell in love with the Aryan prince Rama. An unpleasant story, it's occurred to her, with the two princes Rama and Lakshmana mocking and ridiculing her and finally mutilating her by cutting off her nose. (191).

It makes her reflect:

"Female sexuality. We're ashamed of owning it; we can't speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it" (191).

Through Sumi and Aru's eyes we are also made to witness the unfair treatment meted out to women in different spheres of life. Permi's story about one of her patients, the pregnant wife of an AIDS victim, shocks Sumi and Aru. The callousness of the man marrying, in spite of being aware of his

condition, just so that he would have someone to look after him horrifies them and evokes their pity.

The fact that a Sumi die just as she is about to begin a new life, is a little hard for the reader to reconcile to the death being too abrupt. The revelation about her father's real vulnerable self, which lay behind the grim, silent, exterior is too brief to be convincing. But Sumi has established her identity and found a meaningful existence before she dies.

The novel *A Matter Of time* moves beyond feminist concerns in that it raises the existentialist question itself. It tries to penetrate and analyse the very predicament of human existence and solve the riddle that is life. The important truth revealed is that self-pity is not the answer. It is only through a process of self-examination and self-searching, through courage and resilience that one can change one's situation from despair to hope. The most important message conveyed in the novel comes through Gopal's realization in the end, "If it is indeed true that we are bound to our destinies, that there is no point struggling against them, even then this remains-that we do not submit passively or cravenly, but with dignity and strength" (246).

## 4.2 KALYANI'S SELF ABNEGATION TO ARU'S POSITIVISM

In the previous section we have seen how Sumi fights to search her own identity after the renunciation of Gopal from his family and strives to establish her own identity. In this chapter we will evaluate the main role of Sumi's mother and her influence on the lives of Sumi and her daughters.

*A Matter Of Time* is set against the backdrop of the sad tale of Kalyani and Shripati in the 'Big House'. It is the house to which Sumi returns with Aru, Charu and Seema, when Gopal leaves them. Gopal's absence from the family scene creates unique tension for the various characters. Each one of them tries to find out Gopal's reason. Then there is the conjugal relationship between Kalyani and Shripati. The lack of communication between them impinges on the wider issues of patriarchy that influences the successive generations. History has repeated itself in the life of Sumi. But on both occasions Kalyani and Sumi are silent. Kalyani suffers silently. She fears a similar fate to Sumi. Kalyani's fears are based on patriarchal oppression that condemns women to the margins of silence. She is made to realize that while losing her son, a male heir, she had abandoned her motherhood as well as her right as a wife. Her punishment is that she has to live with this psychic wound. Really it was not her fault. Her predicament is that the woman's body is not only a text of culture. It is a focus of social control, and the site of violence, exclusion and abuse. In this social construction of body the subject is denied agency and is compelled to accept her passivity. For nearly thirty-five years she remains a second sex, a passive silent sufferer. Her body becomes a 'site of colonizing power'. Kalyani's mother in her childhood blamed Kalyani for

not being a son and it is injustice towards females. Kalyani was an intelligent girl and was often playfully told by her father that she would become the country's first engineer. She was, however, not allowed to even complete her schooling and instead was married off to her maternal uncle, Shripati, according to her mother's wishes. Kalyani's mother, Manorma, is obsessed with the fear of her husband taking up another wife as she could not produce a male heir to their property and she does not even relish the idea of Kalyani marrying into new family, as property would then belong to them. Hence she desires that her only child, Kalyani, should marry her brother, Shripati. Such type of consanguineous marriages are quite common in south India where the main intention is to keep the property within the family. In spite of warnings from the medical fraternity about the risk of abnormalities in the products of such unions, these marriages continue to be even to this day. Of Kalyani and Shripati's three children, the last one, who is a boy, is mentally retarded.

Tragedy strikes Kalyani when her four-year-old son gets lost in "that supremely Indian situation. confusion at a railway station"<sup>5</sup> as she is waiting to board the train to Bangalore. Shripati cannot forgive his wife for her negligence and sends her back to her parents' house with her two remaining children, Sumi and Permi. It is only on her death-bed that Manorma is able to prevail upon her brother to return and live in the 'big house' with his wife and daughters. He obliges her but continues to maintain a stony silence with his wife. The enormous cruelty of it, apparently, does not cause as much concern as it would have, if, perhaps, Shripati had forsaken his wife or she had died. On hearing her grandparent's story, Aru is shocked at her grandmother's acceptance of such a life: "And when Kalyani signs her name, carefully,

spelling out 'Kalyani bai Pandit', Aru is amazed. How can she still have his name for god's sake?"(146). At times Sumi too wonders: "But for many others this may well be a sound arrangement where husband and wife are living together under the roof even if there is only silence between them". Sumi recalls Shanker's mother's words "what is a woman without a husband?" (167) Sumi is unable to comprehend the meaning of such an existence. She thinks:

"Is it enough to have a husband, and never mind the fact that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifhood make up for everything, for the deprivation of man's love, for the feel of his body against yours, the warmth of his breath on your face, the touch of his lips on yours, his hands on your breasts? Kalyani lost all this (had she ever had them?) But her *Kumkum* is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife". (167).

But it is Kalyani who emerges as the most powerful character in the novel. Hers is a pitiable story, but one of deep endurance and strength. Kalyani seems to have an endless capacity to bear pain. Even Sumi realizes, "Kalyani's past, which she has contained within herself, careful never to let it spill out, has nevertheless entered into us (...) it has stained our bones" (75).

It is Kalyani who carries within her a sense of history- the Big House to her despite the fact she has had a traumatic past.

Kalyani is a fatalist. She believes in destiny and sees miracles everywhere. The family smile at her stories but, "they don't seem to realize that the real miracle is Kalyani herself, Kalyani who survived intact in spite of

what Sripati did to her, Kalyani who has survived Manorama's myriad acts of cruelty" (151).

Manorama emerges as a cruel, insecure woman and ironically, it is she who is a victim and not Kalyani. In fact Kalyani survives victimization and emerges whole and intact. In a world dominated by men and in which marriage and sons are the only things that matter, Manorama is not unable to see the good that is in Kalyani, nor is she able to enjoy her granddaughters, Sumi and Permi. It is this that Kalyani realizes in the end, when she tells Aru:

"For so many years I thought I had nothing (...). My mother didn't care for my children either. Daughters again, she said. And when you were born, a daughter I wondered how she could have been so blind. Now when I look at you, my three granddaughters, especially at you, I think I am luckier than my mother. She's the unlucky one who didn't know how to enjoy her children and grandchildren." (226).

Aru is a rebel. She rebels against her father. She approaches Gopal not expecting sympathy for her or for her mother. She wants to unravel the strange behaviour of her father. She asks Gopal "Why did you get married at all, why did you have children?" Her searching question makes Gopal re-examine his motives in fleeing from the family. Aru is disappointed to see the tragedy of her grandmother and mother. Out of frustration she declares 'I'm never going to get married.' She holds strong views on patriarchy and how women, in general, get victimized as a result of the actions of men. She is critical of Gopal. She wants to see it that Gopal does not go scotfree. Aru meets a feminist, Surekha, a lawyer by profession.



Aru is similarly surprised to learn from her lawyer/activist friend about the totally unfair system, which had been in force in our country since time immemorial until recently. Aru, who plans to sue her father for maintenance, comes to Surekha for help. Surekha tells her: "you're lucky to be living now. Do you know that Manu does not mention any duty to maintain a daughter? The duty is towards a wife, parents and sons." (204)

Aru also noticed how the women in the family find no place in the family document held sacred by Kalyani. While the document is full of various characters and their descriptions, there is no mention of the women who undoubtedly had a hand in shaping the family tree. A similar observation is also made by Jaya in *That Long Silence* who protests against the family tree drawn up by her Ramu Kaka in which there is no trace of the women who have, according to her, played stellar roles in the family.

The deep-rooted desire of every Indian- male or female-to have a son is reiterated by Deshpande in this novel. Her quote from the *Upanishad* aptly sums up the Indian psyche:

"Whatever wrong has been done by him,

His son frees him from it all:

Therefore he is called a son. By his son

A father stands firm in this world".

*Brahad-Aranyaka Upanishad.* (1.5.17).

Ultimately it is with Aru that the novel comes to a full circle. In the beginning of the novel, just after Gopal's desertion we find Aru in a state of confusion and defiance. She is unable to understand her mother's quiet indifference or her father's behaviour. Like a child she only wants to go back

to the same happy, carefree existence, which they had enjoyed as a family. She particularly resents Kalyani's oppressive love and the way she likes to look after her and her sisters. But gradually Aru matures and becomes more perceptive. Finally, when she hears the story of Kalyani's past and all that she has borne, she forges a special relationship with her grandmother. It is Aru who articulates the feminist voice in the novel. It is she who questions the injustice against women. Much as she loves Gopal and does not want to lose him she seeks legal help to make Gopal pay (at least financially) for what he has done to Sumi. At the same time Aru is sensitive enough to sympathize with her grandfather. When she thinks of him: "She can't think of the cruel husband Sripati, only of her grandfather alone in his room, of the way he looks up when she enters (...). And anger ebbs away leaving her flooded with pity. (144).

Aru's ambiguous feelings leave Sumi worried. Sumi does not want Aru to view every man-woman relationship with suspicion, to see "in every woman a victim and every man a betrayer". With Kalyani, Aru's relationship now undergoes a distinct change. For instance, she exclaims over her grandmother's swollen feet and asks her to show them to a doctor. She gets a basin of water to immerse her feet in and gets her a cup of coffee.

Aru joins a computer class after her exams instead of taking a much-deserved holiday. She also becomes part of a women's activist group. It is through this group that she meets, Surekha, a lawyer. Through Surekha, Aru will understand something of the separation between her parents and will go on to become a lawyer herself. When the news of Sumi's death comes, it is

Aru who rushes to Kalyani and kneeling by her huddled body says, "Amma, I'm your daughter, Amma, I'm your son. I'm here with you." (233).

Through education, determination and an inner strength, the potential for which is revealed only when one suffers, Sumi's daughters find their voice and establish their identities-Aru as a lawyer and Charu, who is already on her way to becoming a doctor. Because of their talents and qualities, two very capable young men, Rohit and Harishi, are already pursuing the girls.

It is because of Aru and Kalyani and the partnership that they have forged, the strength with which they face suffering, that the novel ends on a note of hope. The last image on which the novelist closes her story is not Sumi's death but Aru and Kalyani standing together at the door and the "smile of encouragement" which they have for Gopal.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Shashi Deshpande, A Matter Of Time (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996), 223.

<sup>2</sup>Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha (New Delhi: Rupa, 1993), Vergo

<sup>3</sup>Shashi Deshpande. A Matter Of Time (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996).

All subsequent references in parentheses are to this edition of the novel.

<sup>4</sup>Subhashs K. Jha, "Knotty problems," Sunday, Dec. 22-28, 1996, 54-55.

<sup>5</sup>Shama Futehally, "Eloquent Silence", The Hindu, Jan. 19, 1997, 111.

# CHAPTER 5

## 5. WOMEN AT THE CROSSROADS

Women in Deshpande's novels establish themselves as independent beings free from the restrictions imposed by society, culture, and nature and also from their own fears and guilt. The vital insight that Shashi Deshpande brings to readers is that women should accept their own responsibilities for what they are and see how much they have contributed to their own victimization. "It is only through self-analysis and self-understanding, through vigilance and courage, they can begin to change their lives. They will have to fight their own battles, nobody is going to do it for them" (palkar 134). Deshpande is primarily concerned with the woman and her eternal quest for life.

The concept and image of women has undergone a positive change. No society can ever progress without an active participation of women who are an integral part of human civilization in its over all development. Shashi Deshpande evinces keen interest in the empowerment of women in the multifaceted aspect of life. The women of Shashi Deshpande face formidable challenges to gain their rightful place in the society. They are culture-specific traditional. The major problems faced by Shashi Deshpande's women characters are the psychological conditioning and the gender discrimination, which determine the adult personality of the female child. Her educated middle-class women achieve this feminist consciousness.

## 5.1 SAVITRIBAI INDOREKAR: ROAD FROM REBELLION TO SUCCESS

In *Small Remedies*<sup>1</sup> using the stories of two women-Leela, the trade union activist and Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing diva of the Gwalior Gharana-as the background, Shashi Deshpande explores her favourite theme of a woman set on a journey of self-discovery, a journey which will bring past and present within a single pair of brackets, which will heal the wounds even if it does not provide all the answers.

In spite of Deshpande's repeated denials of being a feminist writer, she creates characters who often contradict such statements. Savitribai is one such character, vividly portrayed and brought to life by the author. Physically she appears to be a frail woman. Looking back, Madhu remembers her as:

"A small sized woman. Even from my child's perspective she had seemed petite. Age and illness have so shrunk her that she's a doll-sized woman now.... The skin is fine and delicate, even if it is crinkled like tissue paper. Her arms are slim and firm, but the hands, with their branching of veins, seem incongruously large for those delicate arms."<sup>2</sup>

She is, however, imperious in her attitude to her servants, students, and even her biographer, often giving her instructions on how to conduct the interview. It needed tremendous grit and determination to be born in a traditional, orthodox Brahmin family and make a name for oneself in the field of classical music. Madhu observes the unspoken resentment in Bai's voice when she recalls how she was abruptly asked by her grandmother to stop singing when she was performing as a child during the family gathering. Madhu herself recollectes how "In Neemgoan she was 'the singer woman' and

there was something derogatory about the words, yes, I can see that now, about the way they said them”(29).

But Madhu refuses to pander to the publisher's wishes to writes a trendy feminist biography. They feel that “ Victim stories are out of fasihon, heroines are in”(167) Madhu, however, “Cannot impose the new concept of heroinism on an old-fashioned woman who whitewashes her life through selective amnesia”<sup>2</sup>. She records the life of a young woman who had lived a sheltered life, of a daughter-in-law of an affluent Brahim family, a woman who even as a child had been part of a large family. For a woman with such a background to elope with a Musilim *tabla* player and live in a strange town among total strangers must have required immense courage.

That there are different yardsticks for men and women in our society is obvious to Madhu who, in her childhood, was a witness to the rejection of Savitribai by conventional society. She remembers how in Neemgaon “each family had its place marked out for it according to religion, caste, money, family background, etc.” (138)

She is aware that her father with his unorthodox ways was an oddity. Beings a widower and bringing up a daughter on his own with only a male servant at home, observing no rituals or religious customs and openly indulging in a drink or two every evening, he obviously stood out in a conservative place like Neemgaon. But, looking back, Madhu realizes that while people were willing to overlook her father's eccentricities and his foibles they were not so generous when it came to accepting Savitribai. “Being a man he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted without open censure or disapproval”; (139). It is only when a woman dares to defy



convention that people are shocked. As Madhu observes, "in a sense, neither of us belonged. Munni's family, with her singer mother, absent father and another man- a muslim-sharing the home, was of course radically, shockingly different." (138).

Madhu also gives the example of Savitribai's father-in-law, who had a mistress, a singer famous for her Thumri singing. It was common knowledge that he visited her regularly. The women looked on in amusement and gossiped about it. They wondered at his choice of a mistress but there was never any outrage over the fact. "That he had a mistress was accepted, a wife from one's own class, a mistress from another- this was normal". (220).

For a man to indulge in his love of music and even to have a singer for a mistress was alright. But, for a daughter-in-law to be learning music seriously, as if she was going to be a professional, was scandalous and unthinkable. Though Bai had the support and encouragement of her father-in-law, Madhu could imagine the anger, contempt and ridicule she had to face from the other women when she returned to her life among the women, after her music classes. She could imagine the jibes and the hostility and the way she would have been cast aside like an untouchable. She says:

"To be set apart from your own kind, not to be able to conform, to flout the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty. Animals know this, they do it more openly, and their cruelty towards the deviant is never concealed. But the subtle cruelty of persistent hostility leaves deeper wounds. There's always the temptation to succumb, to go back to the normal path and be accepted. To resist the temptation speaks of great courage. (221)

Madhu also remembers the gossip surrounding Bai in Neemgaon. There was a station director who frequented Bai's house and got her many contracts with the radio, and was generally believed to be her lover. Madhu remembers the children teasing Munni and calling him her *mama*, a kind of euphemism for a mother's lover. Bai denies the existence of any lover, while recounting her story to Madhu. But to the town, in Madhu's childhood, it was very simple-why would a man go out of his way to do so many favours for a woman, why would he visit her so often? All such assumptions ending finally in the conclusion: "A woman who'd left her husband's home-what morals would she have, any way!" (222)

Madhu is left quite confused at times about Bai's courage or lack of it. She had, undoubtedly, led the most unconventional life anyone in her society would ever imagine. But behind these acts of bravado was a woman who wanted to conform, to be accepted by society.

Savitribai was not the stereotypical feminist with a devil may-care attitude. This is evident in her blanking out Ghulam Saab's name while relating a story of her life to Madhu, her biographer. This reveals her anxiety to cover up her youthful indiscretions in order to present a picture of respectability. She even goes to the extent of hiding the details of her daughter born through her association with Ghulam Saab. Madhu herself is a doting mother, grieving over the death of her son.

Madhu feels that she can give Bai the immortality she desires only if she is willing to pay the price of revealing her daughter to the world- a daughter whose existences she had successfully obliterated until then. She cannot understand why, when she had the courage to walk out on her marriage

and family, she was so frightened to reveal the existence of her child. She wonders how:

“She gave that child the name ‘Indorekar’ – the name she adopted as a singer- not comprising either her maiden name or her married one. Meenakshi Indorekar. Making her out as her child alone, not the child of her marriage, not the child of her lover. This surely is a statement I cannot ignore?”(169)

Munni, however, desperately hankered after the name her mother had left behind and went to great lengths to dissociate herself from her father and, after a while, her mother, Bai had found conventional life stultifying, but Munni yearned for it all her life. As a child Madhu recollected how Munni refused to accept Ghulam Saab as her father and instead concocted stories about a lawyer father who lived in Pune. She also remembered how the girls in their neighbourhood tormented her with questions:

What’s your name?

What’s your father’s name?

Where is your father?

Who’s the man who lives with your mother? (77)

Years later when Madhu met Munni in a bus and recognized her, the latter refused to answer to the name of ‘Munni’ or even acknowledge her childhood friend. She declared that her name was ‘Shailaja Joshi’, trying as it were, to desperately wipe out any connection with her past.

Deshpande, while writing of people like Savitribai and Leela, people who dared to be different, has also created characters like Munni who desperately seek the approval of society. Malathi Mathur, a reviewer, writes:

"At the other end of the spectrum is Munni, Savitribai's daughter who turns her back on her mother and all that she stands for, in a desperate desire to conform, having encountered early in life the poisoned barbs that society levels against those who dare to be different".<sup>4</sup>

Apart from Savitribai, Madhu's narrative also includes the saga of another equally, or perhaps more, remarkable woman, her aunt Leela who was "ahead not only of her generation, but the next one as well." (94) She was a fiercely independent woman and was strongly committed to the communist ideology. She had participated in the Quit India Movement, but was critical of Gandhiji's principles of *Ahinsa* and *Satyagraha* and thought that it was ridiculous to allow oneself to be beaten up. As she grew older, however, she mellowed down and regretted some of her actions. It was evident that she was no run-of-the-mill activist, but a woman who had the courage of her convictions. She resigned from her party when she felt that the party's reaction to a political situation was not appropriate.

Though Leela was a generation older than Madhu, she was financially independent and supported herself. When her first husband, Vasanth, died she took up a job and educated her brother-in-law. She lived in the crowded chawls among the cotton mills and worked for the welfare of the women afflicted with TB. It was this, which first brought her into contact with her second husband, Joe, a doctor who had established a clinic especially for TB patients.

Leela and Joe were poles apart and Madhu exclaims at the strangeness of Joe falling madly in love with her. He was a widower with two children, spoke impeccable English and was very widely read, quoting from his

favourite writers at the drop of a hat. Literature and music were two great forces of his life, in addition to medicine. Leela, on the other hand, wore 'ayah saries', according to Phillio, Joe's housekeeper. She spoke no English and knew nothing of literature or music. She had no sense of humour, according to Joe. But theirs was a wonderful companionship and a beautiful relationship, according to Madhu.

Leela was a person who disapproves of a life that did not look beyond one's own self. Madhu recollects her reaction to the film 'Devdas'. When she remained silent for a long time after watching the film, Madhu thought that the film had evoked memories of her dead husband, who like the hero of the film had died of TB. But what Leela had to say surprised and amused Madhu, Joe and Tony: "Now I know," she said, as if she had solved a puzzle. "Now I know why that poor man drank so much. He had nothing to do; he didn't have any work at all.... If an intelligent man like him remains idle, what else can he do but take to drink?"(96)

Leela disliked the superior status her family gave itself and wondered what made them so special. She did not find anything even remotely worthy in their holding on to the lands, which they had inherited. She did not believe in the caste system and was the only one among Madhu's relatives who accepted Madhu's parents' marriage and invited them to stay with her when they had no place of their own.

Leela was a passionate believer in the communist ideology but did not hesitate to speak up against the party when the need arose. After putting in years of hard work. She was sidelined by the party bosses and never reached the top of the hierarchy, while men who worked under her reached there easily

enough. Once, a widow of a sitting member, who was killed, was given a ticket to stand for elections. This provoked Leela, who had never earlier complained. To comment, "It seems you've got to become a widow for them to remember that you exist." (224) This is, indeed, a telling statement on the chauvinism that rules all political parties.

Savitribai too understood how much more difficult it was for women to rise to the top when compared to men. Madhu wondered if she had ever heard the phrase 'gender discrimination', but she had certainly experienced and accepted it as the normal course of things. Madhu remembers how she had once commented caustically speaking of a young instrumentalist who had reached the pinnacle in no time: "Now a days they become *ustads* and *pundits* even before they have proper moustaches". (224)

At the foreground of the novel is the story of the narrator Madhu herself. She is commissioned to write the biography of Savitribai. She had always been intrigued, even as a child by Bai's relationship with Ghulam Saab and Munni, their daughter. The novel covers that period of her life when she is grieving over the death of her only child, Aditya. In remembering and retelling the stories of Leela, Savitribai and Munni, she presents the glaring inequalities in gender in society. The pity of it is that some of the victims are not even aware of the injustices heaped on them.

Madhu herself is a victim of sorts of which the reader is aware only towards the end of the novel. She had been brought up as a child by two men—her father and Babu, a male servant, but she had no complaints. On the other hand, she felt pity for the children who seemed to be constantly harassed by their mothers. She says: "Motherless child that I am. Motherhood is an

unknown world to me. The mothers I see in my childhood are drab creatures, forever working, forever scolding their children, certainly they are not the women to arouse a sense of deprivation in me. (182)

Deshpande spares no effort to present the picture of life as it is, without conforming to stereotypes. This is all the more obvious in her portrayal of motherhood, which she seldom glorifies. Her protagonist, Madhu, says:

"I get some images of motherhood in the movies I see myself through the songs that speak of my '*ma ka pyar*'. But real life shows me something entirely different. Munni's mother who ignored her daughter; Ketaki's mother, stern, dictatorial and so partial to her son; Sunanda, sweetly devious and manipulating. Som's mother, so demanding-none of them conform to the white-clad, sacrificing, sobbing mother of the movies. (183)

But Madhu herself, turned out to be a doting mother and ever perceptive of her son's every need therefore it was all the more tragic when Aditya, her son, died in a bomb blast.

Madhu's estrangement with her husband, Som, began earlier than this tragedy, when Madhu, waking up after a nightmare, one night, revealed to him a secret which she had locked up in the innermost recesses of her mind. She had slept with a man when she was only fifteen; a man who later committed suicide. Som is unable to accept this of his wife. As one who had been a good husband by any standards and shared a wonderful relationship with his wife, he is now unable to come to terms with this news. He is totally devastated. Madhu is unable to comprehend this: But it's the single act of sex that Som holds on to, it's this fact that he can't let go of, as if it's been welded into his

palm. Purity, chastity, an intact hymen-these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter. (262)

It does not matter that Som himself had a full-fledged relationship with another woman before his marriage. It is a typical situation where a man may have any number of affairs but expects his wife to be a virgin. It's all the more indigestible to Som that his wife had been willing partner. Madhu thinks "that he could, perhaps, have borne: that I had been raped, forced into the act, that I was a victim, not a participant" (260)

Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behavior. Madhu observed how Hari and Lata looked at her when she returned after inadvertently spending a night in a hotel room with Chandru. She thinks:

It does not matter that Chandru is Som's friend and Chandru and I had been friends as well for nearly twenty-five years. I remember the waiter's look last night, when he brought us our dinner, the gleam in his eyes when they rested on me.

Men and women can never be friends. Men can be brothers, father, lovers, husbands, but never friends-is that how it is? (254)

Shashi Deshpande has repeatedly expressed her displeasure at being considered the champion on oppressed women. It is, indeed, a tribute to her that some of the reviewers recognize her for what she is. Malti Mathur writes: "In portraying struggles of these women for identity, Shashi Deshpande waves no feminist banners, launches into no rapid diatribes. She drives her point home with great subtlety and delicacy."



## 5.2 MADHU AND LEELA: GENDER ISSUES AND SMALL REMEDIES.

In the preceding chapter we have discussed the gender discrimination that exist in our Indian society. The growth of a girl in Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it, coming into sharp conflict with the sense of family duty, is the girl's burgeoning feeling of self-identity. It is in the course of this conflict that the full identity of the girl is formed. The successful formation of this identity depends upon the delicate balance that a girl maintains between submission and revolt. Growth into maturity and selfhood is frequently tested in family situation in the course of confrontation with adults.

The burden of the female child is more irksome than that of the male child because aspects of her body, the function of her femaleness intrude upon the growth of her personality. Not only the parents but also the society as a whole is influenced by the physical appearance of a girl child. It is in the adjustment that the family makes to the changing biological processes, and the girls attitude towards the family and parents that the identity of a child gets defined and firmly established.

Madhu was a motherless child brought up by her father and a servant, Babu. But the love and affection she received from them gave her a secure childhood. Her father's death when she was fifteen shatters the adolescent girl. Her grief coupled with the knowledge of another woman in her father's life alienates Madhu. In her grief Madhu is guided by an uncontrollable impulse that makes her body respond to the comforting embrace of a friend of a friend of her father's. His effort to console her leads to a sexual encounter between

the two. But immediately after the incident Madhu goes to Bombay to see her dying father, and the sorrow that engulfs her after his death blanks the incident from her memory. The death of her only parent cuts her away from her roots and Madhu finds herself lonely and alienated from everyone. Having no knowledge of any relative Madhu is troubled when she knows that her father left her in the care of an aunt. Her whole life changes when she finds herself in a new town and a house full of new people. Her stay in her aunt Leela's house proves to be a strange experience. In the beginning she is unable to relate to Leela's husband, Joe as her uncle and his hostile children, Paula and Tony as her half cousins. Madhu passes through a phase of complete loss of identity in her new surroundings amongst strangers. As she later says

"It was not only the knowledge that I was merely passing through, that I would be going to the hostel in a month; it was the unreality of the situation I found myself in, which alienated me from my surroundings. My father dead, Babu gone, I knew not where, the home that had been mine ever since I could remember, no longer there- these things made me suddenly a stranger to my own life. As if I had been moved sideways, away from my place. My own life had ceased to exist and I could only watch, from a distance, others living out their lives." (44).

Madhu who introduces there two women into our lives are not a mere passive story-teller like the chronicler in Pushkin's "Boris Gudenow". She is very much of a *mitgestalter*, a creator with great potential. Though her intention is to write the biography of Savitri Bai Indorekar, Madhu, in coming to Bhavanipur, is attempting to unravel the puzzle that is past, present and

future, understand the vagaries of time's hands and find remedies to the blows life so nonchalantly hands over.

Although Joe and Leela soon make her comfortable and loved, and she even develops a friendly relationship with Tony, Madhu decides to shift to a hostel. After finishing her graduation, waiting to be financially independent, she decides to take a job. Joe's friend, Hamid Bhai's offered to work for his magazine 'City Views' comes as a welcome opportunity for Madhu. To her, the job in, which she edited or rewrote most of the articles and the small room that Hamid Bhai rented her becomes symbols of her independent identity. The sense of fulfillment that Madhu gets from her new job and her home, small though it was, makes her overlook her colleague Dalvi's hatred and his attempts to harass her. The appreciation and self-fulfillment that she receives gives her pride and a sense of self- satisfaction. And Madhu after long years of alienation becomes aware of her needs and aspires to fulfill them.

Tony's frequent visits to Madhu's room along with his friends brings her close to Chandru and Som. Gradually the three make her room their weekend haunt. Her friendship with Som blossoms into love and with her marriage to Som Madhu becomes the part of a real family for the first time. But it is her son Aditya's birth that finally makes Madhu identify herself and find roots in this world. According to her "A child's birth is a rebirth for woman, its like becoming part of the world once again" (88). Motherhood gives a new sense of worth and her whole self, her view, her desires all change according to it. She later recalls that period of her life as "Motherhood takes over my life, it makes me over into an entirely different person. The in-control-of -she Madhu is lost, gone forever. It's my baby's dependence that

changes me; my place in the universal is marked out now" (183). Adit becomes the center of her universe and she gives up her job to become a devoted mother. Her new identity brings in new fears and new dreams. She is overcome with the fear of Adit's welfare. A book called '*Small Remedies*', full of tips for child care becomes the bible for the motherless and inexperienced Madhu. For years Madhu lives with one ambition-the welfare of her son.

However the peace and happiness that she had been enjoying are interrupted by Madhu's revelation of a past incident. A painting at an exhibition brings back to her mind that one incident from her past- her sexual encounter with her father's friend. The knowledge that he committed suicide suddenly fills her with guilt and in a state of shock she tells Som about this incident of her life which she had consciously or unconsciously blacked out. But Som holds on to the single fact of her lost chastity. Madhu later recalls:

" But it's the single act of sex that Som holds on to, it's the fact that he can't let go of, as if it's been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, an intact hymen-there are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter" (262).

Since that day Madhu's impeccable world comes crumbling down like a pack of cards. Som is haunted by her past and becomes suspicious and loathsome towards her. Their days and nights are spent in fights, which exhibit nothing but hateful insinuations for each other. Troubled by his parent's behavior Adit comes to interrupt one such fight during which he finds his father banging his mother's head against the wall. Later Madhu cannot recall exactly who had shouted at Aditya to go away. But one of them had, and Aditya in a state of shock walked out-never to return. His death in a bomb

blast engulfs them in grief and emptiness. Madhu's world is shattered, Aditya the centre of her life, whose needs and welfare had occupied her life for seventeen years is untraceable. She waits for him to return and in a state of shock she walks the streets of Bombay looking for him. She sits by the telephone waiting for his call. Completely out of touch with reality, Madhu's days are spent in uncertainty and nothing makes her accept Adit's death. Even when Som tries to tell her about the riots in the city, the various bomb blasts, Madhu does not care, as she remains pre-occupied with her search for Aditya. She wanders through the streets of Bombay and feels rewarded when she imagines that she has caught a glimpse of him. Only when confronted by Som at the end of one such day, does Madhu accept the truth that Adit was dead and he would never come back? But with reality comes alienation, of having lost her role of a mother that had been occupation for seventeen years. Tony, Rekha, Ketaki Chandru, Som all try to bring her out of her cocoon but nothing in life interests Madhu any more.

The novel opens with the sentence, "This is Som's story" (1). It turns out soon that it is rather Madhu's story. Madhu, who, enclosed in a fog of bereavement caused by the death of her only son, seventeen-year-old Adit, while mulling over past incidents, remembers her quoting once T.S. Eliot's words, "In the life of one man, never the same time returns" (3). The occasion was a small gathering after Joe's- Leela's husband's- death. Som was telling them about the party Joe's students had thrown at the retirement of their beloved teacher. And how after a marathon party, Joe had remarked, "that was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Shall we do this again tomorrow?"(3) It was then, out of the blue, that Madhu had quoted Eliot's famous sentence from

*The Murder in the Cathedral.* Words which had silenced everyone assembled there showed them how ominously empty life can be. It was Tony who with a light remark had saved the situation, pulling them back from the abyss.

Thinking of this incident now, Madhu feels that you can neither undo nor repeat what has happened, that the past is irrevocable, that "Time moves on relentlessly and you have to go along with it" (5). There is no other alternative. Absolutely none. There is no cure to life's ills, no prevention.

That the Ganeshas in niches, the decorated thresholds, the mango leaf torans, the Oms, the Swastikas, the charm and amulets- (are all designed) to keep disaster at bay, to stave off the nemesis of a jealous god (81).

Nothing like that will help. No mantra can ward off the evil eyes. Even thinking philosophically "to get happiness, you've got to accept the sorrow and the pain as well" (81) is futile; such thoughts do not make it any easier to bear the past, do not lessen the pain.

Madhu is like Kisa Gotami whose search for someone who can bring life back to her dead child had taken her to the great teacher Gasutama Buddha himself. On seeing the distraught mother fiercely holding the lifeless body of her child in her arms, Buddha had told her that he would be able to bring her back to life if she would bring a fistful of mustard seeds from one such home where there has been no death. Gautama Buddha's Kisa Gotami had then gone- with a heart brimming with hope- in search of the mustard seeds that would revive her son. The people in all the homes on whose doors she had knocked upon were ready to give her a handful of mustard seeds but from none could she accept the life giving seeds, as there was no house, which was not visited by death. Kisa Gotami, who goes door to door, realizes, finally, that

in a man's life death is as certain as birth, goes back to Buddha with a calm mind, joins his sangha, and finds peace. The search for tiny mustard seeds had acted like a soothing remedy to what had come across like an eternal pain.

She knows that even if there are no dreams left for her because of Adit's death, life has to be lived. That nothing works against mortality.

Mustard seeds to protect us from evil, blessings to confer long life—nothing works. Simple remedies? No, they're desperate remedies and we go on with them because, in truth, there is nothing else (315).

Madhu's attention is diverted from her grief when Chandru coerces her into taking the job of writing the biography of Savitri Bai. In Bhavanipur where Savitri Bai, the singing legend of Gwalior Gharana, lives, Madhu takes residence in the house of a young and loving couple Lata and Hari. She accepts the change as she tells herself that she's here to forget the horror of Adit's death. Lata and Hari fail in their efforts to make Madhu a part of their life, as she remains aloof. During the daytime Madhu engages herself in her work and remains an indifferent observer in the life of people around her. Madhu's grief makes her night as most difficult to bear.

Even Tony's visit does not help Madhu shed her grief. It is only gradually that she becomes more than a silent observer of Lata and Hari. Lata's affection and sincere efforts pay off but it is Hari who reveals to Madhu his connection with her mother and begins to call her 'Kaku'. Thus for the first time Hari brings Madhu back in the real world by initiating her to new relationship. Madhu comes out of her reminiscence of Adit as Hari quizzes her on the life of her aunt Leela. In spite of her desire to remain isolated and detached, Madhu slowly gets involved in the lives of the people around her.



Bai's sudden stroke and Hari's accident creates a crisis, which brings her in the centre of all action. Madhu's final break down and her talking about Aditya's death proves to be cathartic for her. For the first time since Aditya's death she opens up and tells Hari of her mindless waiting for her son. Carefully avoiding the memories of her fights with Som she confides in Hari, telling him about her hope of seeing Aditya again, which kept her alive. And her final break down when she is frustrated in her attempts to find Adit. For the first time she speaks of the sorrow of not being there're at his final moment. Voicing her anguish she says "I can't come to terms with my ignorance of those days, I am obsessed by the need to reclaim them from the darkness. Sometimes I think I could have borne his death if I had been able to be with him, to see him die. We have a right to share it, the most profound human experience of death, with those we love, we have a right to be with them, to travel part of the way, even if we cannot go all the way. But I was denied that right, I was deprived of it. I don't know, I will never know how he faced the moment?" (305-06). She finally speaks of her loss of identity and alienation from her life when she says, "How long will I live this way? And what for, oh God, what for?" (306). Indeed what for? As for seventeen years Madhu had no identity, no desire for self. But talking about the loss lifts the burden and brings in the realization of the despondency of her life.

Madhu's wounds start healing when she meets a young family celebrating the "Upnayanam Ceremony" of a boy in the Bhavani temple. On being asked to give her blessings to the boy she wonders, "What blessing can contend against our mortality? Mustard seeds to protect us from evil, blessings to confer long life-nothing works. And yet we go on. Simple remedies? No



they're desperate remedies and we go on with them because, in truth, there is nothing else" (315). This realization of the inevitability of death, and everyman's destiny against which we cannot fight, makes her accept Aditya's death. Hasina's prayer on the stage of Bhavani temple where she recites, "I saw a dream, I saw a dream" reminds her of her dreams and Som's dream woven around Adit. But it also gives her the strength to accept fate. She is not resigned to her fate but accepts it with dignity and once again recovering her own sense of self she becomes aware of her needs. She realizes that she needs to share her loss with Som. Now it is not only her sense of despair she is willing to share but also her joy and pleasure of having Aditya for seventeen years. Therefore she feels " We need to be together, we need to mourn him together, we need to face the fact of death and our continuing life together. Only is this healing possible. I think of how Tony and I, when we speak of Joe and Leela, bring them back into our lives for a while. Som and I will have to do this for Aditya, only Som and I can do it for him; between the two of us, we can recreate him, we can invoke his presence and make his existence real. And then, may be, we can have our own ceremony, Som and I, we can wash away the darkness and ugliness, not only Aditya's death, but of what happened before, with our own oblation of sesame seeds and water" (323).

Thus the knowledge that Som and she have Aditya's memory gives her hope to live and face life. Madhu in the end has attained self-realization and now hopes to accomplish her dream to recreate Aditdy in her memory and unburden her soul. Thus the novel ends on the note of affirmation as she feels "How could I have ever longed for amnesia? Memory, capricious and

unreliable though it is, ultimately carries its own truth within it. As long as there is memory, loss is never total" (324).

Madhu's job of writing a biography of Savitri Bai Indorekar brings out in pieces, often selected pieces, the life and personality of Bai "Doyen of Hindustani Music, belonging to Gwalior Gharana". Through the interviews in which Bai carefully gives a self-satisfying version of her life and Madhu's knowledge of Bai's life, which came from being her neighbour many years back, she tries to capture the real Bai. Savitri Bai, as Madhu learns came from an affluent Brahmin family of which she was the eldest grandchild, hence endowed with love. She was initiated into the world of music by her mother who was also gifted with melodious voice but had restricted her singing to devotional songs. Overjoyed by Bai's talent, her mother gave her lessons but her father prohibited Savitri Bai from pursuing music further. Tradition had made the art of music and dancing a talent in nautch girls and therefore it was below the dignity for a daughter of high class Brahmin family. After marriage Bai's desire to pursue her dream sees hope when she learns about her father-in-law's love for music. His encouragement gives her confidence and she begs him to let her learn music. A number of traditions were broken and a female trainer was arranged for Bai, soon followed by a Muslim tabla accompanist. But this breach of tradition created a furor in the family and gave rise to many discussions. It was Bai's determination to achieve her goal that gave her the courage to face the jibes and hostility of family and society. Once again in her quest for identity she revolts against tradition and walks out of her marital house with her tabla player, Ghulam Saab. To realize her dream she struggles though a life of hardships and ignominy and even gives birth to a daughter out

of wedlock. In her single-minded pursuit to be the disciple of Pandit Kashinath Buwa, she bears unaccountable hardships. Her efforts bear fruit as she becomes a professional singer and gradually reaches the pinnacle of success.

However her success does not make her a self realized person as she struggles to attain her lost respectability. In pursuit of her dream Bai had the unstinted support of Ghulam Saab. A relationship like theirs in patriarchal Indian society was bound to malign Bai's character "a woman who'd left her husband's home- what morals would she have, anyway! Bai was obviously damned by everyone" (223). Apart from this there was also the rumour of her other lovers who helped in the progress of her career like the station director of the radio station in Neemgaon. Yet when Bai speaks of her life she does not talk of Ghulam Saab and her daughter, Munni. Madhu too is left unaware of what made Ghulam Saab return to his family. As Madhu realizes "She had drawn a line through Munni's and Ghulam Saab's names and erased them from life. This is something she did long back, when she returned to respectability, when she began her journey to success and fame. Perhaps she thought that to attain these things, this denial of her lover and daughter was necessary. I imagine that the denial also made it possible for her to live with herself" (154). Bai's efforts show her desire to reclaim her lost dignity. Madhu even notices that it was after her separation from Ghulam Saab that she appears again as a married woman wearing her old mangal sutra. Her efforts signify that she may have achieved her dream but her life is spent in her struggle to regain the identity she had lost. Thus even towards the end of her

life, Bai strives to find her identity by ignoring a part of her life. But to Madhu her biographer, the real Bai remains elusive even to her own self.

Munni, the illegitimate child of Savitri Bai and Ghulam Saab, is alienated from her very childhood because of her parents' unusual relationship. The fact that her mother, a Brahmin married woman was living with a Muslim man made them a misfit in the society. In order to belong to the society she believes that her real father was Savitri Bai's husband in Pune. Munni grows up denying to herself and to others that Ghulam Saab was her father. Her assertion that "My name is Meenakshi" or "He's not my father". "My father is in Pune. He's not here" (31-32) shows her futile attempts to disown her own father. Munni very strongly tries to detach herself from the illegitimacy of her parent's relationship. She is open in her dislike of Ghulam Saab. On the other hand she talks of Bai's husband with much affection. She tells Madhu that he is in Pune, in Shukuwar Path, that he is a lawyer, a very famous one and earns a lot of money, thousands of rupees. Ghulam Saab, she tells her was only a tabla player for her mother. Thus creating her own imaginary relations, Munni strives to attain the life and identity of a respectable family, which Bai had rejected.

Her imagination helps her lead a life of illusion and she creates stories to convince others of her life separate from Bai and her lover. To Madhu she says that Ghulam Saab had kidnapped her therefore she's not living with her father in Pune. She is forced to live here in Neemgaon and asks, "Do you think I'd have come here otherwise? (...My father would never have let me go" (64). And a reason that he cannot come to take her back is that if he comes Ghulam Saab will kill him. Full of hatred for him she calls him her enemy and

talks of his cruelty exercised on her through starvation and beatings. However no matter how much she rejected Ghulam Saab as her father her resemblance to him foiled all her efforts. Aware of her resemblance to her natural father" (...) she tried hard (...) to cover it up, deliberately cultivating a bedraggled ragamuffin look, far removed from his tidy elegance" (75) yet her eyes light gray in colour " (...) unmistakably linked her to the man she so strenuously disclaimed as father" (75). Later apart from her father, Munni's relationship with her mother is also unusual. Madhu, her neighbor remembered Bai as stern and uncaring. Her ambition made her neglect her daughter, and Munni unloved and uncared for reciprocates in a similar way. She develops contempt for her mother and detests everything about her. From her talent to her looks Munni rejects everything. She even hates the men who come to visit or hear Bai sing. To her, Bai and her lifestyle meant disgrace. Therefore she openly rejects it and tries to cut herself from it.

All her life Munni struggles to reject her parentage. If she tries hard to make her resemblance with her father negligible she also deliberately denies her vocal talent, as it would link her to the two people she desperately wanted to detach herself from.

However, years later it is her light gray eyes that make Madhu recognize Munni. Munni's childhood is spent in her struggle to attain a respectable status and some how she even succeeds in doing so. She is accepted by Bai's in-law and after marriage becomes a common middle-class woman named Shailaja Joshi. Thus to some extent she achieves the identity she had striven to attain. As Madhu feels "Fighting with her back to the wall for the identity she wanted to have, the one she claimed finally, successfully

denying her old one: Shailaja Joshi-a long way from Munni, daughter of Savitri Bai and Ghulam Saab" (77).]

Thus to Munni her identity lay in being an ordinary woman belonging to respectable family for which she had rejected everything associated with her mother-music, genius, ambition and freedom. Through Munni's search for identity Madhu learns "But for all of us, there's self inside which we recognize as our real selves. For Munni, the self that she saw as her own lay in the future, it was towards that self that she moved with deliberation, it was that self I met in the bus- an ordinary looking woman with an ordinary family life and a name so ordinary that it covers pages in the telephone directory" (170).

Yet her past, the illegitimacy of her birth catches up with her. Madhu's recognition of her after so many years pushes her a few steps back in her struggle. Finally her death in the same bomb blast, which killed Aditya and her recognition as Shailaja Joshi, only child of Savitri Bai Indorker, neutralizes her life long struggle to attain an identity separate from her mother. Thus, in death Munni is once again identified as the daughter of the woman she detested. Munni in spite of her determination fails to attain self-realization as instead of accepting her true self denies the truth of her birth, her identity given by her parents. Therefore, she leads towards a life of illusion and deception where she fails, as in death her identity claims her.

Leela, Madhu's aunt, was a woman confident and well aware of her needs. From her very childhood she showed an inclination towards studies rather than the domestic chores considered most suitable for girls. Seen as a rebel she is married to a man of few means by her grandmother. Who wanted to punish her? But for Leela, the punishment turned into a blessing as her

husband encouraged her to study and she cleared her matric examination. Her husband's death due to TB further strengthened her resolve to be independent and answer her callings. It rather gave her a direction and purpose, as she had to support her young brother-in-law and ailing mother-in-law. Considering them as responsibility, Leela refuses to return to her parent's house. This serves her relation with her own family but her determination and strength makes her successfully take up a teaching career and support her in-laws. Thus Leela's awareness of her responsibility towards her in-laws and her desire to fulfill it and not shrink away from it turns her revolt into affirmation. Hence Deshpande here gives a new dimension to assertion or ambition, which leads to revolt against tradition. She stresses that affirmation does not mean shrinking one's duties and responsibilities; rather it is fulfilling these with courage.

Leela was aware of her needs and the goals she had been aspiring for. Therefore she fought against all odds and restrictions to achieve them. She worked as a social worker and nursed TB patients. During the freedom struggle she plunged into the Quit India movement and was also sent to jail. After independence she protested against price hikes. Thus all her life Leela tried to fulfill the desire of her true self-irrespective of the limitations of tradition. In her personal life too she revolted against tradition and being a Brahmin widow dared to fall in love with a Christian. She married him after fifteen years. Her decision to marry Joe after years of waiting for Joe's daughter, Paula's consent shows her resolve and her determination to attain her identity. Joe and Leela's belief in each other and the love they shared made them marry in spite of Paula's objection. Hence in spite of the barriers



of caste, religion, tradition, language, lifestyle and a hostile child they found fulfillment in each other. Thus through her determination Leela attains self-realization and fulfillment in the love and companionship of Joe. After his death she finds herself a little lost. It was her awareness of the needs of self that made her a more understanding person. She understood Madhu's need to live alone in the hostel during holidays or her desire to work and live independently. However, it is Leela who reaches the stage of self-realization. All her life she had striven to attain various demands of self and her persistent pursuit of these eventually earns her happiness and contentment.

Hence, Shashi Deshpande through her novel *Small Remedies* projects the quest for self-realization of Indian women in a hostile patriarchal society

She makes honesty an important tool in the quest for self and projects Bai and Munni as failure due to their denial of a certain part of their lives. Madhu's and Leela's ability to accept the facts of their life achieves them success in their quest. But what forms the crux of the novel is the fact that we are all alone in our quest for self. Madhu may learn from the experiences of Bai, Munni and Leela but she alone has to find her identity by understanding her life. As Deshpande's epigraph of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* from The Dhammapada states this secret to self-realization,

"You are your own refuge;

There is no other refuge,

This refuge is hard to achieve."



## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Shashi Deshpande, *Small Remedies* (Delhi: Viking/ Penguin Books India, 2000). Parentetical references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Hindu*, 7 May 2000.

# CHAPTER 6

## 6.1 GENDER DISCRIMINATION - I

Gender which Fowler dismisses as a grammatical term only (and most dictionaries follow suit) now has meaning beyond grammar. It is viewed as a culturally imposed role and as different from sex, which is biologically determined. Gender as differentiated from sex, has nothing to do with biology—gender is a social and cultural construct. A creation of patriarchy, it serves the male flair for domination, and is not based on mutuality but on oppression.

Socialization plays an important role in the construction of gender, and bares the link between social values and the paradigms of male domination. Socialization is a very powerful instrument; it has enormous influence in conditioning not only a girl's but also a boy's psyche since its influence begins early in childhood. Roles no doubt are an inalienable aspect of social living and relationship, but it is the abuse of socialization in conditioning the girl child so that she acquiesces to patriarchal paradigms that make it questionable. In literature one gets how a girl child is indoctrinated to withhold, conceal and suppress her real self. Myths that socialize and contain the Indian woman abound in ancient literature. A number of studies have analysed them for gender discriminatory values. The overall picture one gathers from literature is subordination, exploitation, violence and oppression, trapped in patriarchal cultural value and paradigms.

The growth of a girl in Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it. Coming into sharp conflict with the sense of family duty is the girl's burgeoning feeling of self-identity. It is in the course of this conflict that the full identity of the girl is formed. The successful formation of this identity depends upon the delicate balance that the

girl maintains between submission and revolt. Growth into maturity and selfhood is frequently tested in family situation in the course of confrontation with adults.

The burden of the female child is more irksome than that of the male child because aspects of her body, the function of her femaleness intrude upon the growth of her personality. Not only the parents but also the society as a whole is influenced by physical appearance of the girl child. This is a great hindrance in the inner growth of the child. It is in the adjustment that the family makes to the changing biological processes, and the girls attitude towards the family and parents that the identity of a child gets defined and firmly established.

Down the ages, the place of women in the tradition bound, male dominated society has been very unenviable. Despite epoch-making changes the position of women - economic social and cultural - has not shown much change. A vast majority of women are reconciled to a life of humiliation in form of gender bias while performing the roles of wives, and mothers in a rigidly custom bound milieu they live in. Even women with liberal modern education, with an irrepressible yearning to break loose from time honoured crippling and inequitous social laws, do often lose their moorings and find themselves in perilously embarrassing situation. Even economically independent women have not been able to clear off the besetting pitfalls created by the custom and beliefs sedulously preserved in the tradition bound Indian society.

It is said that the literature of a country is the storehouse of the cultural and sociological aspect of its people. But literature all along has been turned to

the point of view of the male element. Woman is often 'marginalized' 'repressed' or 'silenced' in literary work. The role of woman was restricted by her womanhood and therefore, the experiences of the muted female forming half of the society was not reflected in literature.

But with the rise of feminism, women became aware of the fact that their inferiority is not ordained in heaven that gender is neither natural nor immutable, because it is a creation of patriarchy and patriarchy is not given. It is a construct, which can be deconstructed. Women realized that the system of patriarchy which existed since a long time, no longer served the needs of the rapidly changing society where women were trying to emancipate themselves and define their potential. Revolting against their marginalization they have started questioning the sexual politics and gender arrangement.

The emergence of women novelists has considerably influenced the change in attitude. Their writing reflects a shift in the sensibility of the writers as well as that of the reader. Shashi Deshpande portrays the new Indian woman and her dilemma. She concerns herself with the plight of the modern Indian woman trying to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being. Childhood considered so important a period for the formation of character and for the emergence of a value structure has largely been ignored as an area of human experience-specially where girl characters are concerned. This reflects both a literary and a social reality. Girls are silent part of the family and society. What they think or feel about their social eclipse does not interest most writers or social thinkers. The most formative years of the woman's life-when she is growing up remains by and large unexamined and unexplored. Shashi Deshpande is perhaps, one of

the few Indian English writers who have portrayed the girl child with deliberation. There is either one-girl child or there is a detailed examination of the girlhood of the protagonist who attempts to define her adult self-identity by analyzing her growing years. This process helps her realize that her personality has been determined by her family upbringing and socialization in childhood.

Deshpande unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation at work in the family and in the male oriented society. One of the features of their upbringing is their inculcation as girls into the socially defined roles as daughter/mother/wife. Deshpande shows great sensitivity and awareness of the ways and means through which a young girl is prepared for her future status in society. The factors that influence her include cultural aspects, social and psychological factors such as the family structure, woman's position in it, female sexuality and the trauma of monthly cycle. Her major novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots And Shadows* and *That Long Silence* trace the quest for self-definition of women, who are educated and modern but who cannot quite shake off their background and the manner in which they have been brought up.

Gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships. In the Indian family, there exists despite its patriarchal character, an independent community of women that evolves as a result of taboo and an interaction between the sexes. It is here that the female child is acculturated into her social role of daughter/wife/mother. Sarita the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* grows up as a victim of her mother's sexist and gender based bias. Even as a child she remembers her mother's preference for Dhruva

her brother and the importance attached to his birthdays. The birth of a son, after sixteen years, which should have embarrassed Kshama's father in "*Come Up and Be Dead*", fills him with pride, which bewilders her. In *That Long Silence* Jaya notices that her name had not been included in the family tree "How can you be here? You don't belong to this family. You're married (...) you have no place here"<sup>1</sup> (143).

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Sarita is constantly reminded that she is a girl whose destiny is to get married and leave the house, while her brother need not do so. The mother is concerned about her daughter's appearance, the colour of her skin. Should she grow dark it would be difficult to get her married:

Don't go out into the sun, you'll get darker.

Who cares?

We have to care even if you don't. We have to get you married.<sup>2</sup>

One is reminded of Kamala Das who in her *My Story* recounts how worried her grandmother was about the duskiness of her skin and rubbed raw turmeric every Tuesdays and Fridays before her oil bath.

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman- it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature (...) described as feminine"<sup>3</sup> this idea becomes relevant when one sees the methods through which a girl is acculturated into femininity. Even daily household chores are set aside for girls- chores like setting the table, cleaning up after meals, helping in the kitchen, doing odd jobs. Boys are discouraged from doing them. In *That Long Silence* eyebrows are raised when one of the girls question angrily "why can't one of the boys do it? Jaanu or Shridhar? Why does it have to be Veena or

me? (81). She had been answered by mocking smiles. Jaya's husband Mohan is scandalized when she suggests that he should cook during her pregnancy.

Although this process of preparing the girl towards her 'otherness' begins in early childhood, it is intensified from the moment she attains puberty. As a girl grows up, she is made to feel different from her male siblings, made to feel conscious about revealing her femininity to the male members of the family: You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even if it's only your father who's around. (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*5).

And so the process of growing up becomes something to be furtive about. The concept of honour plays an important role in the repression of the girl's sexuality. Any misbehavior on her part would bring shame both to herself and her family, resulting in decreased chances of a good match. She is groomed for the fulfillment of the desired goal of her existence-marriage. All the prayers and rituals of girl's life are directed towards the procurement of a husband, his longevity and the propagation of his lineage through the birth of male offsprings. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya is told again that "a husband is like a sheltering tree," (137) and that "the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (138).

Deshpande's novel explores the quest for selfhood undertaken by women who come from such environment. They are caught between a traditional upbringing and the longing for freedom in the modern sense. A quest for identity forms the theme of *That Long Silence*. Jaya the protagonist, thinks of her past and tries to analyse herself to decide who she really is.



The fact her husband rechristened her Suhasini confuses her in her search for identity. The pen name under which she writes confuses her all the more. Jaya stood for victory and Suhasini for submission. Jaya rejects the name Suhasini, and it is significant since it is a manifestation of protest against such customs. Through the process of reliving the past in her mind, she gets guidance for her future. She decides to break her seventeen years of silence and gives up being a mere passive partner to Mohan, her husband. She decides to assert herself as an individual and also as a woman, wife and mother. Though she chooses to remain within the family a change has been wrought. She has come out of her confining slots allotted to her by the patriarchal society.

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* revolts against her mother's oppressive dictates becomes a doctor and even marries a man of her choice. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* rebels in a similar fashion. A motherless child, her renegade father and Akka the strict and disapproving matriarchs of the family leave her to fend for herself in a traditional family. She manages a good education, a job and a husband. Indu, Sarita and Jaya despite their early rebelliousness, cannot quite free themselves from their early socialization and its effect upon their psyche. Indu finds herself becoming an ideal woman and becomes like her traditional aunts, Sarita's victimization by her mother on the basis of gender causes her to become ruthlessly ambitious to the extent of undermining her husband's confidence and making him impotent. Jaya, falls to assert herself sinking into apathy, neglecting even her talent for writing.

Inspired by the feminist movements of the West, misinterpreted freedom, made in total switch over to the other side, seeking freedom from

everything including their culture. Deshpande's characters find freedom not in the Western sense but in conformity with the society they live in without drifting away from one's culture. Jaya's decision is not meek surrender to circumstances, but a sensible compromise. Deshpande supports the view that feminism is pro-woman but not antiman; she rejects a separatist stance. Aware of the fact that breaking off the bonds of family would result in loneliness and disintegration of the larger social set up, Jaya looks for happiness and fulfillment within the family itself.

From Akka in *Roots and Shadows*, who was married at the age of thirteen to Manda, Nilima and Sati in *That Long Silence* Deshpande traces the pattern of socialization and the internalization of patriarchal norms and values. While the older woman remains chained to traditional background, the younger emerges confident. The type of family structure plays an important role in the change. In an educated nuclear family without the orthodox patterns of socialization and repressive tradition in a nuclear family they grow without inhibitions regarding their being feminine as in the generation that was earlier and in a joint family.

## 6.1 FEMALE SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE - II

‘Karyeshu Mantri, Karanaeshu Dassi,  
Rupeshu Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitri,  
Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayanetu Rambha,  
Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni.’

(Like a slave while serving; a minister when counselling, Goddess Lakshmi in her looks; the earth in forbearance; a mother while feeding; Rambha, the celestial prostitute in bed; these six are the true characteristics of an ideal wife.) <sup>4</sup>(2-3)

Traditionally, in the Hindu marriage the position of husband and wife is clearly defined. The husband is expected to be the authoritarian figure whose will should always dominate the life of the wife. The wife should regard him as her master and should serve faithfully. Thus the traditional concept of superior husband and subordinate wife had been the guideline of Hindu marriage.

The Indian tradition considers the marriage ceremony as one in which the husband and wife become one however “that one is the husband.” In an Indian marriage it is understood that the wife will merge her name, personality, life style and in fact, her entire life into that of the husband.

Although the institution of marriage has been long enduring, it has undergone a number of changes. The process of industrialization, urbanization, Westernization has led to the breaking up of the traditional joint families. It also brought about politico-economic, cultural and socio-psychological changes in the life patterns and attitudes of the people of India, especially among the urban population. With the growing emphasis on

education, the Indian woman experienced freedom and struggle to improve her lot. Education brought economic independence of women, which in true changed their outlook, and the traditional equation of superior husband and inferior wife. The traditional concept of love marriage as sacrament and sex as a taboo is fast losing its importance. As Promilla Kapur, the renowned sociologist has concluded in her study *love, Marriage and sex*, that woman now aspire for "natural companionship, respect, material comforts, and satisfaction of emotional and physical needs, in marriage."<sup>5</sup>

The inability of the men to understand such needs and accept the individuality of women threatens their marriage. The traditional mindset to ignore woman's sexuality and to consider a woman immoral and frivolous, if she gives expression to her pleasures in sex is changing with the attitude of woman. More and more women are now viewing sex as a physical need. In this regard Promilla Kapur concludes on the basis of her survey, " All these findings suggest that the negative attitude towards sex or that of condemnation has lost ground considerably and the positive attitude regarding sex as one of the needs of every human being is emerging." (Kapur220)

Marriage and sexuality as a subject of study has been left unexplored by most of the early Indo-English novelists, as it was overshadowed by the various socio-political problems that dominated the milieu. The Big three, Manohar Malgaonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya and even Nayantara Sahgal talked of human relationships but in the light of social political or historical problems. But a man-woman relationship in isolation was rarely discussed as a theme. It was the novels of Anita Desai that concentrated on this theme and brought out the point of view of women for the

first time. Since then a number of women writers have explored this theme. As Anuradha Roy writes in her book *Pattern Of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women writers*:

"Marital relationships have almost inevitably been the focal point of novels written by women. But there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels, which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance. The emphasis is not on the development or mechanics of the relationship but on the forces, which work together to make the relationship a farcical exhibition of togetherness. Functioning along fixed parameters, marriages become an arid formality, devoid of contact."<sup>6</sup>(Roy87-88)

Shashi Deshpande, an eminent novelist has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital relations she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them.

"Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life.

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy." (Deshpande. *The Dark* 45)

The predominance of marriage in a girl's life, had never let Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, forget that she was a girl. Her mother, a woman rooted in tradition constantly reminded her of the difference between her and her brother, Dhruva. Her remark that she was nothing more than a burden, a responsibility that had to be transferred at the appropriate time, makes Saru detests the tradition, which limits the life of a girl to marriage.

The bitterness that had crept into their relationship after Dhruva's death and her mother's constant reminder that she is a girl, makes the growing Saru hate her sexuality. "You're growing up she would say (...). And it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your own father" (Deshpande *The Dark* 62).

Saru grows up hating her womanhood that consisted of feeling impure and ashamed of one's sexuality and living with the sole purpose of getting married. She vows to rebel against such traditions and in spite of her mother's objection joins a medical college in Bombay. It is here, while studying anatomy and physiology that she begins to accept her womanhood rather than detest it. She begins to enjoy her female identity and learns to dress and walk gracefully.

Her meeting with Manu brings back the memories of her old college days when she a student of first year and was fascinated by Manu, a post-graduate student. His multifaceted personality of a good student, secretary of literary association, an active member of the dramatic society, a budding

writer and a poet of promise, had made him a college hero. Even if their association with each other was brief, Manu's good looks with "a firm chin, dark, thick straight eyebrows and full lips" had left an impression in her heart. However the approaching examination had brought the infatuation to an abrupt end.

Their second meeting triggers a romance and Manu with lost glory and declining future immediately responds to the now attractive Saru's interest in him. However Saru still blinded by the image of the charismatic Manu of college days, fails to notice his present professional failure and wavering confidence. Her mother's disapproval of the match because of Manu belonging to a lower caste brings back in Saru's life the obstructions laid by tradition. Adamant not to yield to the traditional views of her mother, she marries Manu the day he acquires a room for them to live in. Hence Saru ignores her mother's warning and overlooks the hierarchical difference between their caste and profession to marry Manu.

With marriage Saru experiences the joy of discovering her sexuality. For her marriage becomes a means to fulfill the love and affection she always longed for. Later she recalls, "I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted"<sup>7</sup> (Deshpande. *The Dark* 40).

The Meager income that Manu gets from his job of a college lectures and their one room in a *chawl* does not interrupt their bliss. Basking in Manu's love, Saru feels that she has achieved the traditional aim of being chosen by a "superior male". But soon she realizes that Manu is no superior. Her neighbour become aware of her professional identity, the day she walks back

in a blood stained coat, after treating victims of an accident. Instantly her profession achieves for her a position superior to Manu's. She is recognized and respected by the neighbours who come frequently to consult her. The respect that Saru gets disturbs the traditional equilibrium of the superior husband and inferior wife. Later analyzing her marital relationship she recalls:

"But now I know it was there it began (...) this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this too (...) that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (Deshpande. *The Dark* 42).

Her newfound respect and recognition blinds her to Manu's changing attitude. He becomes irritable and grows tired of being ignored everywhere and his wife getting all the attention and praise. His inability to accept the reversal of traditional roles makes him morose and Saru unaware of this considers his roughness in bed as, "the ardours of his love."

Saru's ambition and her desire to attain a comfortable life make her take help of Boozie, a senior doctor and a philanderer. She aims higher and responds to Boozie's interest in her. He moulds her into a polished sophisticated urban woman and helps her career progress in leaps and bounds. While her association with Boozie kills her reputation, Manu ignores the whole affair. However, she continues with the friendship as it helps Saru attain her ambition. As Y.S Reddy opines "Strictly speaking, there is nothing 'physical' in Saru's affair with Boozie. To suit his own interests, Boozie



openly flaunts his 'relationship' with Saru as a cover to his homosexuality"<sup>8</sup> (Reddy 58).

Hence Saru finding a means to attain her dreams, moves forward while Manu retains his old position of a lecturer in a third grade college. This disparity deepens the rift in their relationship. But things change for the worse when a reporter from a woman's magazine comes to interview Saru and asks Manu, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (Deshpande. *The Dark* 200). This question makes Manu even more conscious of the reversed positions held by them. That night Manu attacks and physically assaults her in bed. This nightmarish incident is repeated and with increased brutality every time he is reminded of his inferior status. One such night Saru wakes up "(...) to darkness and an awareness of fear. Panic then pain. There it was, for the second time, what I had just lulled myself into believing was just a nightmare. The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. And above me, a face I could not recognize. Total noncomprehension, complete bewilderment, paralyzed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength, which overwhelmed me. My mind, fluttering, threw itself despairingly on the walls of unbelief and came back staggering, bruised and spent. And then, mercifully, the end, the face still hovering over mine, changing as the body relaxed, becoming the familiar known one of my husband's. The face and body both are moving away to become a familiar huddled shape by my side" (Deshpande. *The dark* 112).

Calling it "(...) a certain hallucinatory discovery on the part of the protagonist,"<sup>9</sup> (Mishra 84) Charu Chandra Mishra seems to overlook the very theme of the novel and undermine the suffering of a woman, however the bruises on Saru's body and pains in the morning tell the tale of her nightly assault.

Saru's efforts to confront Manu in the morning are often aborted by his normal behaviour and feigned ignorance about the rape. It leads to her doubting herself but the repeated rape and bruises on her body leave no doubt in her mind.

Later Saru recalls that Manu assaulted her whenever he was reminded of his economic dependence on her. When his colleague's wife taunts her husband that even he could take a trip to Ooty if he had married a doctor, once again Manu is reminded of his modest income and luxuries, which he could afford with Saru's money. The ingrained traditional values in Manu, which rigidly declared that it was the husband's duty to provide for the wife and children, make him feel that he is a failure. The fact that Saru, his wife a subordinate member of the family, successfully retains his role infuriates and frustrates the egoistic man in him. To satisfy his pride he employs the only means through which he can assert his manhood. He subjugates Saru by physically assaulting and raping her, as he can find no other way to prove his superiority.

Saru, an intelligent and independent woman endures repeated rape because of shock and her love for her children. A woman in constant turmoil, she longs to talk about her miseries. Her effort to break the silence takes her to

a lawyer, but the thought of talking about it and the social stigma of divorce, unnerves her.

Realizing that her profession and economic superiority have become the cause of Manu's frustrations she even talks to him of quitting her job but Manu quickly reminds her of the monetary loss and deterioration in lifestyle her decision would bring. Ironically, Manu's pride is not hurt while enjoying the luxuries that Saru's money provides. But a reminder of her success and his failure awakens a beast in him. Commenting on Saru's decision to quit her job Charu Chandra Mishra opines, "Once a big catch, a handsome and virile man for husband, Manohar fails her in bed in satisfying her nymphomaniac urge. Now she is empowered to ride over him either by black mailing to resign her job or corner him to accept her domination as the bread-earner of the family" (Mishra 83).

This is certainly a prejudiced opinion. By suggesting ulterior motive in Saru's sincere efforts to amend the wrongs in her marriage the critic fails to recognize the pain and helplessness of a woman, desperately seeking peace in life.

The regular violation of her body by the man she once love and the hypocrisy maintained by him makes Saru dislike everything about him. With her faith in love and marriage shattered, Saru grows to detest the very act of sex. Even Padmakar Rao, her old classmate's efforts to establish a relationship with her fail to tempt her. Critics like R. Mala and Charu Chandra Mishra have questioned Saru's character on the basis of her friendship with Boozy and Padma. But "Saru's affair with Boozy (her boss) and Padmakar Rao (her collegemate) seem temporary for her unfulfilled marital life," (Reddy 69) as

for her "Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfillment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word" (Deshpande. *The Dark* 133). Saru's sexuality is killed with marital rape she sees herself as nothing but "a dark, damp, smelly hole" (Deshpande. *The Dark* 29).

The news of her mother's death and her own miserable condition makes Saru leave home for sometime, in search of peace. She pretends to leave in order to see her father but in reality she grabs the opportunity to escape her nightly tortures. Once at peace with Baba and Madhav she relishes the peaceful nights and the joy of waking up without aches and humiliations. She contemplates her childhood, and her relationship with her mother. In retrospect she is reminded of her mother's words. "I know all these love marriages. It's love for a few days, and then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then." And her own reply, "To you? God, that's the one thing I'll never do. Never!" (Deshpande. *The Dark* 69).

Because of the suffering she undergoes Saru even considers warning the young students of her friend, Nalu. She longs to tell them the rigid rules of tradition according to which,

"A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A., you should be a B.A. if he's 5'4" tall you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage (...). No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in the

favour of the husband. If the scales tilts in your favour, God help you, both of you" (Deshpande. *The Dark*137).

Even her friend Smita, whose name was changed by her husband, reminds Saru that the patriarchal Indian society thrives on virtues like submission and self-effacement in women and employs no other means of happiness for them. Her friend, Nalu, a man-hater, feminist is seen as a rebel-a misfit in the traditional Indian society. In this context Y.S Sunita Reddy remarks, that through Smita and Nalu "Shashi Deshpande tries to repudiate the myth that women find fulfillment only in marriage. She, however, doesn't go the other extreme of proclaiming that all unmarried women are destined to be happy"(Reddy 65)

Saru's long hours of introspection into her marriage makes her realize that her professional success had killed Manu's spirit. Actually her introspection helps her to free herself from the feelings of guilt that she has made Manu what he is. She decides that she would not endure any more humiliation because of Manu's failure and her success.

The sudden news of Manu's arrival agitates her and for the first time she breaks her silence and tells her father about her marriage. Scared to go back to those nightly tortures she is ready to escape as she is determined not to see Manu again. Her father's advice that she must learn to face the problem rather than escape from it stops Saru. Left alone by her father the realization dawns upon Saru that she cannot run away from reality forever. She decides to assert herself and fight her own battle. She realizes that her life is her own which she will have to shape as well as face the events of her life. There is no refuge, other than one's own self. With this in mind she confidently waits to

confront her husband. On this basis to conclude, "At the end of the novel, however, by implications she goes back to her home in Bombay," would be presumptuous. (Tripathi 45)<sup>10</sup>

Disagreeing to such conclusions Deshpande had herself stated that: "(...) in *The Dark*, there was no doubt at all in my mind that Sarita is not going back. I am perpetually surprised that people haven't understood that" (Holmstrom 247)<sup>11</sup>.

Thus the novel ends with the certainty that now Saru will no longer be a victim of Manu's frustrations. She derives pride in her professional success and decides not to feel guilty for someone else's failure. A confident Saru realizes that the essence of any marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjugation of one by the other. With this knowledge she readies herself to confront Manu.

A contrast to Saru's marriage is that of her mother's. Following the traditions, her mother led a life of self-effacement, as after her death when Saru enters the room she feels "It had been 'their' room, but it had always seemed only his, so successfully had she managed to efface her personality from her room" (Deshpande *The Dark* 19). However in reality Saru's mother was a domineering woman who often overshadowed her husband. In retrospect Saru remembers that even as a child she had known that her father "was feeble. No, worse than that, that he was a non-entity and didn't matter" (Deshpande *The Dark* 29).

Born and brought up in a conventional family, Saru's mother had learnt to blindly follow the tradition made by the society. Her husband's timidity and her bold and outspoken nature makes her a dominant figure in the

family. She steps into the role of the head of the family who imposes the traditions of a patriarchal society. Her blind faith in the righteousness of these patriarchal norms makes her a strict ruler. Instead of creating a balance by her authority she begins to rule over the lives of her husband and children. Only once as Saru recalls, her father asserted his will and sent Saru to study medicine. So reserved was the traditional role in her family that when Saru returns after her mother's death, she perceives tranquility in her father. She is immediately reminded of an uneasy silence, which dominated her parent's life. Later her father regrets this lack of communication in their marriage and confesses that silence had become a habit for them. So deadening was the silence in their house that he never knew till late that his wife was ill and dying of cancer. And she strictly obeying tradition of an uncomplaining wife suffered but did not break her silence.

"A couple, the uneasiness or tension between them inspired the theme of marital rape in the novel. And I knew that the man was not doing as well in his career as the woman was, and I connected the two" (Holmstrom 224).

Deshpande, through this novel brings to light the fact that marriage is the only option in a girl's life. She even treads on the problem of career women and their marital constraints. As the novel shows that Saru's professional success becomes the very cause of her crumbling marriage. The issue of woman being professionally superior to the husband goes against the traditional roles set by matrimony. Through the Saru-Manu relationship Deshpande raises the question of marital rape, which the Indian tradition does not recognize. She shows that rape within marriage becomes the ultimate means by which the husband subjugates his wife.

Indu, the heroine of Shashi Deshpande's second novel *Roots and Shadows* is brought up in a traditional household run by the dominating Akka.

Akka is the most respected matriarch of the family. She single-handedly runs the house of her brother and with it the lives of his children and grandchildren too. A rich, childless widow she returned to her brother's house after her traumatic marital life came to an end.

Akka's story is an example of the suffering a girl undergoes due to traditional evils like child marriage. Married at the age of twelve to a man thrice her age and size, Akka becomes a victim of his lust. She fails to satisfy his fondness for woman and like feudal lords he had a number of mistresses. Akka's attempt to escape her nightly tortures by running away from home is foiled by her mother-in-law who caught her and beat her up. In spite of being locked for days without food Akka would beg her mother-in-law in vain not to send her back to her husband's room. Through Akka's condition Deshpande brings out the brutish treatment of women especially young girls in the name of tradition, which compelled a wife to please her husband, no matter how brutal he was to her. She highlights the Indian tradition, which had denied a woman any right over her own body and made her a victim of marital rape. As a result of such inhuman conditions, Akka begins to view sex as a punishment.

Her tender age had made it difficult for her to give birth to a living child thus making her unable to fulfill the greatest purpose of a woman's life. Adding to the misery of failed pregnancies and being ill treated by her mother-in-law, her husband's debauchery took a new turn with his love for a particular mistress. In spite of regular ill-treatment, beastly assault and humiliation, Akka served her husband like a dutiful wife when he was carried home after a



stroke. However his cry for his mistress could not relent Akka's heart, which was hardened by years of sufferings. Refusing to be humiliated again she told him "Listen to me. It's my turn now. I've listened to you long enough. She came here. Twice. She wanted to see you. She cried and begged to be allowed to see you just for a short while. I threw her out. You'll never see her again"<sup>12</sup>(Deshpande. *Roots* 71).

In control of her life and situation for the first time, Akka asserts herself and refuses to be humiliated again. But her mournful tears at night tell the tale of a loveless and mortifying marriage. Her experience in marriage is an example of the condition of girls who are trapped in marriage even before they realize the need for it. The Hindu tradition, which has always adulated husband worshiping, self-effacement and subordination in a wife leaves girls like Akka with no choice but to endure in silence. Y.S Sunita Reddy opines that, "Sex as a punishment was perhaps, how it was viewed by such child brides who nevertheless did not raise any banner of revolt but on the other hand continued to suffer and helped to perpetuate such oppression" (Reddy 35). However, in Akka's context some parts of this statement is most disagreeable as a close reading shows twice Akka a girl of thirteen tried to escape but was caught. Besides one should not forget the revolt against marriage was not acceptable and the woman who chose to do so was often treated an outcast. Thus girls like Akka had no choice but to endure.

Returning home a rich childless widow, the illiterate Akka takes over the family and enforces the same tradition, which had made her life a misery. Indu, the protagonist is brought to her care when Indu's vagabond father leaves her, after her mother's death. Brought up under the care of Atya, Kaka

and Akka, Indu from the beginning was expected to follow the traditions of the family. However, her intelligence, education and rebellious nature always brought her into conflict with Akka. Indu grows up questioning the conventions, which defined different patterns of behavior for girls and boys. Refusing to be meek, submissive and sacrificing which were traditionally expected of a girl, she was constantly at war with Akka.

The crude way in which her sexuality is introduced to her makes Indu resent it like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The impurity attached to a girl's puberty shocks her. In her desire to break free from such orthodox rules she decides to join a college in Bombay and stays in a hostel. She adheres to her decision not to go back to the traditional set up which suffocated her. Therefore, she stays in Bombay and takes up a job. However her meeting and subsequent marriage with Jayant brings her back in the framework of tradition which she had been running away from. She instantly falls in love with him and decides to marry him in spite of Akka's objections. Her love for Jayant makes her propose marriage. But once married she realizes that Jayant's expectations were the same as any stereotyped Indian male. His traditional belief that woman should be passive and not demonstrative of her love and emotions, surprises Indu. Her response to his love was unacceptable to him. "It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I'm like that, he turns away from me. I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive" (Deshpande. *Roots* 83).

Juxtaposed to Indu is Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, who develops an aversion to the sexual act because of marital rape. While Saru

silently bears the physical tortures and humiliation, Indu silently crushes her passion and desires to please Jayant.

Indu's independent and assertive nature, which had made her rebel against various traditions, now fails to do so. She had laughed at the women of her family calling them "martyrs, heroines or just stupid fools?" but she herself starts adopting their ways bit by bit to avoid conflict in her marriage. The total suppression of her will makes her think:

"When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants what he would like? What would please him? And I can't blame him. It's not he who has pressurized me into this. It's the way I want it to be. And one day I had thought (...) isn't there anything I want at all?" (Deshpande. *Roots* 49).

Her love for him makes her endure the discontentedness she feels in her marital relationship. The process of self-negation makes her uncomfortable and uneasy even while Jayant sees no problem in their marriage. Tired of pretending Indu gets a "welcome reprieve" when she receives Akka's summon. She decides to go in order "to avoid thinking about what was happening to me (...) to Jayant and me (...) and our life together" (Deshpande. *Roots* 18).

Her stay away from Jayant gives her the opportunity to analyse her marriage from a distance. She realizes that in loving Jayant and pleasing him she had become the self-denying and self-effacing traditional wife she always detested. Her realization of the problem in her marriage makes her confide in her cousin, Naren. Their growing intimacy draws them to each other. Indu's troubled relationship with Jayant and her desire to break free from the

traditional role of a passive wife makes her use Naren as a means to unburden her suppressed passions. She consciously surrenders herself to passions. This move of Indu has been severely criticized by critics who feel that to assert herself an intelligent woman like Indu had to stoop so low. Attacking such allegations Y.S.Sunita Reddy remarks, " Perhaps this is Deshpande's answer to the double standards practiced by our society where only men are allowed to take sexual liberties" (Reddy 43). Moreover Indu's liaison with Naren also represents the assertion of her sexuality that was so rudely ignored and crushed by her husband.

A close reading of the text reveals that this relationship with Naren brings "A sudden relief in her" for suddenly she knew what was wrong with their marriage. Her suppressed feelings that were suffocating her had created uneasiness in their marital relationship. She realizes that her submission to Jayant's will was to avoid conflict and prove to her family that her revolt against traditions actually brought her happiness. Her close association with Naren also shows her own faults, which were responsible for creating a rift between her and Jayant. Naren's love for music and his ability to lose himself in it makes Indu realize that there was nothing shameful in her need for Jayant. She learns to accept her feelings without embarrassment. She understands that by losing herself in him she will be able to create a harmony in their lives. Her awareness that her love was the uniting bond, which will create this harmony, makes her give up the feeling of disgrace and pretence. She knows that she must reveal to Jayant her whole self with all her weakness as well as strengths. And he would have to accept her with her virtues and vices. That alone would make perfect understanding possible and give a better chance for happiness.

The fact that Indu is free from guilt and regrets, after her relationship with Naren, shows her detached and emotionless involvement with him. To her, emotions were of most importance in any relationship and her mind being pre-occupied with Jayant, she was unable to develop any such feelings for Naren. She realizes that she has to achieve an understanding with Jayant. Naren introduces her to her own need to be free, free to live without pretence and on her own terms.

Eventually she decides to return to Jayant with a view to be honest to him and to her. This makes her revolt against the traditions, which force a woman to suppress her desires and sexuality. Thus a changed Indu, not ashamed of her love and sexuality but proud of it, meets Jayant, with a challenge for him to accept her. In this context to say that "She is willing to wound but afraid to strike. As a result of this, instead of leaving Jayant, she goes back to him with the vain hope that things will change"<sup>13</sup> (Sandhu34) is unjust as the novel itself reveals that Jayant after sometime accepts the change in Indu with renewed respect. Her thoughts:

" Now I think he knows me better, my strengths, which I had hidden from me, as well as my weaknesses. Perhaps, because of this, we have a better chance. There is ease in our relationship that was not there before. If my feelings have cooled down to some extent (...) the fever is no longer there (...). I have gained something else in return. I no longer fight my need of him. I am not ashamed of it. I know it does not make me less of a human being" (Deshpande. *Roots* 14).

Thus Indu's realization and assertion of her needs makes the novel end on a clear note of affirmation, to which Jayant greatly contributes. His

recognition of her true self helps Indu hope for a better chance of understanding and happiness in marriage.

Indu's cousin, Padmini's life is also instrumental in making Indu realize her good fortune to have found love in marriage. She realizes the value of love and decides to make it a boon rather than a burden.

Through the circumstances in Mini's life, Shashi Deshpande highlights the socially accepted yet unjust traditions of the patriarchal Indian society. She shows the traditions according to which the average Indian girl is brought up, - her sole aim to get married but whose long wait to achieve it becomes a torturous experience. Her humiliating exhibition in front of prospective grooms and rejection on the basis of slight flaws or dowry or horoscope, speaks of the traditions, which treats daughters like commodities. Embittered by such experiences Mini tells Indu,

"You don't know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav-Kaka running around after eligible men. And then, sending the horoscope and having it come back with the message, 'it doesn't match?' And if the horoscopes matched, there was the meeting to be arranged. And mother and Ataya slogging in the kitchen the whole day. And all those people coming (...) And staring and asking all kinds of questions. And if we heard they were old-fashioned people, I would dress up in an old fashioned manner and they would say, 'She's not modern enough'. And if I dressed up well because someone said the boy wanted a smart wife, they would say, 'She's too fashionable for us.' Or too short. Or too tall. Or too dark. Or some thing" (Deshpande. *Roots* 126).

Thus the limitation of choice makes girls like Mini, uneducated and domesticated, marry whoever is willing, even if it is an illiterate fool. The hopelessness of Mini's situation where she feels she's "committed a great crime by being born a girl", gives strength to Indu, to strive and preserve what she had fortunately acquired- love in marriage. However she questions the utility of marriages such as Mini's and feels, "Behind the façade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that generations might continue?" (Deshpande. *Roots*3).

*That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande's most critically acclaimed novel is about the long silence that engulfs the marriage of Jaya and Mohan. Mohan's demand of an English-speaking wife makes him tie the knot with Jaya, a well-educated girl. Jaya in turn marries Mohan out of defiance, as her mother disapproved of him. In spite of Mohan's expectations he had a strong traditional background where he had grown up seeing his mother silently submit to every erratic demand of his father. With the roles of submissive wife and domineering husband deeply ingrained in his mind, he enters into matrimony with Jaya. Whereas Jaya, the only daughter of an unconventional family, adored by her father and brothers was brought up differently. The disparity in their background leads to a clash of expectations. The first conflict of ideas takes place when Jaya pregnant and repulsed with the odour of cooking oil asks Mohan to cook. Insulted by her demand to do something unmanly Mohan tries to laugh it off. Jaya's insistence flares up into a fight in which Jaya responds in an equally bad temper, as she had always done at her father's place. Mohan shocked at her display of anger, voices his

disapproval by, repeating, "How could you? I never thought my wife could say such things to me. You're my wife (...)(Deshpande. *Silence* 82).

Jaya realization of that her anger had shattered him. It had broken the image of a traditional wife, which Mohan had in mind. The image, which was created by his mother, about whom he had proudly told her, "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her" (Deshpande. *Silence*83). His mother had silently endured the moods of her drunkard husband and slogged to fulfill his irrational demands. This had set in Mohan's mind the qualities of endurance and sacrifices in a woman.

Jaya's realization of the depth of patriarchal traditional belief in Mohan makes her understand the cause of distaste on his face when she shouted and his refusal to speak to her till she realized her mistake. She realized that "to him anger made a woman 'unwomanly'" (Deshpande. *Silence*83). Since then Jaya like a dutiful wife learnt not to annoy him lest it should affect her marriage. For the first time she becomes aware of the role of a wife and its limitations. She blames her parents and their easy life-style, which did not train her to be a perfect wife as she saw in the women at Mohan's house. Realizing that Mohan unobtrusively likes to follow the traditional pattern, she moulds herself according to it. As she feels:

"I had learnt to control my anger after that, to hold it on a leash. Terrified of his disapproval, I had learnt other things too, though much more slowly, less painfully. I had found out all the things I could and couldn't do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly. It was when I first visited his home that I discovered how sharply defined a woman's role was. They had been a revelation to me, the women in his



family, so definite about their roles, so well trained in their duties, so skilful in the right areas, so indifferent to everything else. I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before, and I had been entranced by it" (Deshpande. Silence83).

To become an ideal wife and mother Jaya learns to suppress her own desires and acts according to her husband's wishes. With this "Suhasini" the name Mohan had given her at the time of marriage, begins to give shape to Jaya's personality and becomes the antithesis of Jaya, the rebel. Jaya willingly accepts her new identity of Mohan's wife, of Suhasini, and tries to become and remain a "smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped" (Deshpande. Silence16). As Suhasini she becomes the epitome of a happy woman, as traditional society perceives it self-centered and priggish. The story of the crow and the sparrow becomes an ironical symbol of her life, wherein the weak and the sensitive can be treated with the cruel carelessness by the more successful ones. Hence Jaya like the sparrow devotes her life to home and children. She adopts a life-style, which revolves around the needs and wishes of Mohan and her two children. She cuts her hair because Mohan wants her too. She entertains the people Mohan invites and befriends the wives of the men Mohan likes.

Jaya even gives up her creative writing as Mohan disapproved of the stories she wrote. On his suggestion she takes up writing non-controversial middle column called 'Seeta'. Mohan takes pride in her column but to Jaya, an intelligent, woman, it was a frivolous piece, which satisfied everyone except her. The importance of Vanita Mami's words "husband is like a sheltering tree which is to be kept alive and flourishing even if it meant by deceit and lies,"

sets in her mind and she adjusts her life to it. Thus begins the '*Long Silence*', which dominates their life.

When the monotonous flow of their life is disrupted by Mohan's malpractice, they send their children, Rahul and Rati, for a vacation with some friends. Jaya like an obedient wife, follows Mohan to their Dadar flat. She unquestioningly accompanies him for "he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails (... (Deshpande. Silence11).

For, years she had taught herself to wait in silence, to accept her husband's desire mutely. The appalling banality of such a life dawns upon her when her busy routine is replaced by idle hours. Jaya feels, "There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy" (Deshpande. silence 24-25). Living alone with Mohan in the Dardar flat Jaya reviews the sexual aspect of their marriage and the loss of desire and emotions in her. For her "sexual memories are the coldest." They stirred up nothing in her. For her it had become more of a routine or a mechanical process without necessary emotions. She knew the whole process of his love making, which ended with Mohan's question whether he had hurt her and her mechanical reply "No". A lack of communication and absence of intimacy mars their relationships and they never discuss their feelings. Mohan never tries to know her expectations and desires and even Jaya never speaks of them.

Mohan's upbringing which had made him insensitive to a woman's needs reminds Jaya of Kamat, a caring and understanding man, who used to live upstairs, when Jaya and Mohan had first lived in this Dadar Flat. Jaya's association with Kamat develops into a deep friendship based on communication. In him, Jaya finds the companion she missed in Mohan. She shares with Kamat her memories of her father and mostly her designs to become a writer. Kamat advises her helps her discover her talent as a writer but in the process he feels attracted towards her. Kamat's gift of casual physical contact revives desire in Jaya and reminds her of her sexuality. Regarding this R.K. Sharma concludes:

"Sex had always seemed such a momentous thing to her, but he made her feel it as just another part of the overall scheme of life, and certainly nothing to feel guilty about. And while they did have sex occasionally, and while sometimes she did feel an 'overwhelming urge to respond to him bodily'"<sup>14</sup> (Sharma 114).

This seems to be a misinterpretation as a careful reading of the text reveals that Jaya never forgets her marital status and does not succumb to desire. Shashi Deshpande herself remarked in an interview "(...) I did bring in Kamat to serve a purpose: to show Jaya the kind of relationship that she could achieve with a man. She gets a kind of companionship with Kamat that she never gets from her husband. Yet that is marriage and this isn't" (Holmstrom 247). Thus Kamat is brought in the novel as a foil to Mohan though Jaya's intimacy with him does not lead to any physical relationship between the two. She walks out on Kamat when she finds him dead as she is aware that society

does not acknowledge any relationship between a woman and a man outside marriage, however innocent it may be.

Now, back in the Dadar flat with little work on her hands Jaya's desire to write all about marriage, love and life revives. She notices the condition of married women around her and realizes the extent of suffering a woman has to undergo in marriage. She recalls the life of Mohan's mother. Her never ending suffering had to be endured in marriage, as she had no choice. In a frustrated attempt to free herself of repeated pregnancies, she hit herself and tried to abort yet another unwanted child. In the process she met her painful death coupled with ignominy for she dared to go against tradition by aborting her unborn child.

Similarly Jaya's old maid-servant Jeeja also experiences a turbulent marriage to a drunkard only to be abandoned for another woman. Jeeja blindly accepts the traditional belief that a married woman must give birth to children. Since she failed to do so, she accepts that she is of no importance to her husband and had every right to abandon her. Therefore she accepts his second wife and even looks after their son after their death.

Jaya's analysis of her marriage makes her realize the limitations of the traditional wife. In retrospect, she is forced to accept the fact that, in seventeen years of marriage she had moulded herself according to Mohan's wishes. The only assertion of her self she recalls was the abortion of her third child, which she had undergone without Mohan's knowledge. Certain that Mohan would impose his will on her, Jaya had taken this bold step without informing him.

Regarding the rest of her life, she feels that she had unconsciously done what her family had advised her to do, "to keep Mohan happy". She

realizes that she chose to do so because it was easy to conform, be guilt free and comfortable. But in the process her marital relationship had become like "Two bullocks yoked together (...). It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go different directions would be painful and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?" (Deshpande. *Silence* 11-12).

When Mohan with dwindling confidence seeks Jaya's support, she fails to sympathize with him as her years of silence had made her indifferent. Feeling cheated, Mohan realizes for the first time that Jaya's silence does not mean her unstinting support. His accusation that she was indifferent to him, a fact, he notices after seventeen long years amuse Jaya. She finally breaks her traditional silence by bursting into a hysterical laughter and Mohan, humiliated by her reaction, walks out of the house.

However Mohan's walking out on her, makes her suddenly feels vulnerable and deserted. Jaya is overcome by the fear of being abandoned by her husband. Her awareness of Kusum her alter ego who had gone through a similar fear and committed suicide because of it, gives Jaya the courage to fight her fears. Deshpande had brought in the character of Kusum to highlight the silent acceptance of suppression by woman. Kusum's state of distress and desperation leads to mental imbalance. In order not to face the humiliation of an abandoned wife she ends her life by jumping into a well. Kusum's story helps Jaya, but in the process unable to bear so much mental strain Jaya collapses and falls seriously ill.

However, as she recovers, she realizes that Mohan cannot be solely held responsible for their troubled marriage. She begins to accept her own failure in establishing a normal reciprocal relationship with Mohan. Her

contemplation of their past life unravels to her, her own role in her suppression. She realizes she agreed to Mohan's wishes because conforming to social norms was "safe, comfortable and unassailable." Long hours of contemplation lead to her decision to give up the role of a silent and passive partner with a resurgence of faith, Jaya now decides to erase the silence that had defined and distorted her communication with her husband. In the end Jaya feels that:

"Two bullocks yoked together that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It's wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I've always thought- there's only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices." (Deshpande. *Silence* 192)

Lord Krishna's sermon in *Bhagwadgita*, "I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire" (Deshpande. *Silence* 192) gives her the courage to assert her feelings. Mohan's letter and her long hours of contemplation lead to her affirmative decision to give up her silence. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists turn out to be most realistic and balanced in their view as, Jaya after a long deafening silence and seventeen years spent with an insensitive and rigid man, decides to change her own perspective and hopes to change that Mohan too. Anita Desai's Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* loses her mental equilibrium because of her inability to analyse her husband's insensitivity and her own troubled feelings.

With a hope to make Mohan understand her and her feelings, Jaya prepares to face life for "life has always to be made possible" (Deshpande. *Silence* 193).

*The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande's fourth novel is her boldest statement of a woman's sexuality. As she herself said, one of the themes of the novel was "about controlling women's minds and bodies"<sup>15</sup> (Deshpande. *Women's* 26). It begins with the life of Urmila, an intelligent, independent, outspoken woman who is trying to cope up with the grief of her daughter's death. Taking Urmi as the anchor, Shashi Deshpande has roped in the story of Mira and Kalpana and with them other characters to show the sexual wrongs done to women in patriarchal Indian society. In her despondency over Anu's death, Urmi stumbles over the diaries of Mira, her dead mother-in-law. Her venture into Mira's life introduces her to the traditionally guarded life of the Indian woman. Considering the woman as weak and dependent the Indian tradition had empowered the male members to take control of her life. Mira, is one such woman who becomes a victim of such traditions. A budding poet and an eager student, Mira loses her right to education because a man decides to marry her. With an obsessive love the man plots to get married to her, leaving her with no choice. Mira's unwillingness to marry and her interest in studies have no significance for the man, who nourishes the dream to possess her. Traditionally marriage is the only goal of a girl's life. Fearful that they may not get a better match, Mira's parents decide to marry her to man much older to her in age, instead of letting her discover her poetic talents or pursue studies. Her fear of marriage and the right it grants to a man over a woman's body is expressed in her verse:

But tell me friend did Laxmi too  
twist brocade tassels round her fingers

And tremble, fearing the coming  
Of the dark-clouded, engulfing night.

(Deshpande. *Vine* 66)

Emotionally immature and sensitive at heart, Mira could not accept her husband's love and obsession that was limited to sex. She fails to accept him as her master and worship him. His imposition on her, which he saw as an expression of love, shatters the sensitive Mira, who creates a wall around her and recoils from establishing an emotional bond with him. Her inability to cope and his forced lovemaking makes her nurture a dislike for him. She realizes that the patriarchal Hindu society and its traditions do not acknowledge a woman's feelings. Thus submitting to the traditional role of a wife she writes:

"I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings. He knows what I'm doing and he gets angry with me. I don't mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, and it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, so it begins. 'Please', he says, 'please', I love you.' And over and over again until he has done, 'I love you.' Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all" (Deshpande. *Vine*67).

The frequent invasion of her physical space leaves her wanting for "a room of her own". It is socially accepted that in marriage a husband has a right over his wife's body and it is the duty of the wife to satisfy the physical needs



of her husband. This traditional negation of a woman's right over her body and her own sexuality also forms the theme of Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and the short story *The Intrusion*. Shashi Deshpande through her novels has criticized the tradition that dictates that the husband has a right to satisfy his biological needs irrespective of the wife's willingness, thus allowing a crime like marital rape.

As Indrani Jaisingh, an eminent lawyer opines: "It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence (of rape) as her consent is assumed"<sup>16</sup> (qtd. In Trivedi 147).

Mira too becomes a victim and endures the violation of her body in silence. But her feelings are expressed through her poetry in which she pours her bitter experiences. Urmi later observes "It runs through all her writing a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married " (Deshpande. Vine63).

Mira's untimely death in childbirth ends her cloistered existence with a man she could not love and people she had nothing in common with. But the untold experiences of her life revealed in her poems, disturb Urmi, who identifies Mira's story with that of Kalpana's, a lower middle class rape victim. Kalpana, a young and attractive girl becomes the victim of her uncle, Prabhakar's lust. Urmi comes in contact with her and her mother Shakutai in a hospital and in the process of helping them she becomes involved in their problem. However, from Shakutai's life Urmi becomes aware of the suppression and ill treatment of women in the lower strata of society.

Having waited for a year after her marriage, when Shakutai finally came to stay with her husband she found him jobless and homeless. Living in a room with his cousins, she joined him and worked all day without any complaint. But her husband's insistence on sexual intercourse even when they had to sleep in the corridor, with men walking up and down, had been most humiliating for her. In spite of such experiences she even took up a job to support her three children and her useless husband. Shakutai however realizes the limitations of her choice because Indian society and its traditions do not allow a woman to walk out on marriage. In spite of her submission to a hopeless marriage, Shakutai receives a shock when her useless husband leaves her for a younger woman. Urmi also realizes that for women like Shakutai, even if the husband is jobless and drunkard, marriage holds importance for it brings security. But Shakutai's story also reveals the duality of society, which expects a woman to keep her marriage even if the husband is good for nothing whereas, it allows a man to walk out for no reason.

Shakutai's sister, Sulu had been her only support in such times of trials. However, Sulu, the perfect housekeeper faces unhappiness in marriage as her husband, Prabhakar refuses to touch her because of her skin disease. As a favour he makes her realize that he does not abandon her but allows her to cook and clean for him. In turn he asks her to make Shakutai's daughter, Kalpana marry him. Prabhakar's desire for Kalpana dates back to the time Sulu and he brought Kalpana to their home with the idea to bring her up. But Kalpana's molestation by Prabhakar made the young girl get away from him and loathe him for the rest of her life. Since then Prabhakar's desire for Kalpana had grown into an obsession.

The so-called security of a marriage had made Sulu compromise with the situation and agrees to get Kalpana married to her husband. Her acceptance to a life of humiliation where she would serve Kalpana and her husband after their marriage shows her desperation and lack of choice. Thus the novel reveals that for women like Sulu there is no choice but to cling to a crumbling marriage. Sulu's desperation becomes the biggest cause of her exploitation where she submits to any injustice only to stay married. On the other hand, men like Prabhakar successfully fulfill their obsessive desire. As even if Kalpana rejected his offer of marriage Prabhakar was not deterred and he brutally rapes her.

Urmi realizes the limitations of choice for women in marriage. Her awareness also makes her analyse Akka, her husband's stepmother's marriage. Akka too had little choice but to marry the husband of dead Mira. Having outgrown the traditionally accepted marriageable age she had lost the opportunity to find a suitable husband. Therefore she was married to a man who was obsessed with his first wife. Thus she was forced to marry a man who wanted a mother for his beloved son more than a wife.

Analyzing the condition of women in marriage Urmi reviews her own marriage with Kishore. She had gone against her family and her friend, Vanna to marry Kishore, but she had walked out on him on the wedding night as Kishore felt trapped by marriage. Her intention in doing so was to prove that her love for him which, culminated in marriage, was not a binding, which will end his freedom. To prove him wrong she goes to sleep at her parent's house. Thus regardless of traditions, Urmi had dreamt of building her relationship with Kishore on companionship and understanding. But Kishore's job in the

Merchant Navy disrupts her dream of a normal life. She feels frustrated with his short visits, as she never finds time to develop an emotional relationship. The long separation from him often fills her with physical longing to have him permanently by her side. Every time he goes "the parting is like death" to Urmi but her hard exterior deceives even her mother, as she never lets her know her anger and grief. Her efforts to express these feelings to him are always answered by Kishore's passionate love making. But Urmi remains disillusioned and unfulfilled because she realizes:

"(...) sex is only a temporary answer. I came out of it to find that the lights had come back (...) 'Go to sleep', he said. He was kneeling by me his face close to mine, but the closeness was only physical. His voice was cold I could see the goose bumps on his shoulders, his chest. I did not look into his face. I was afraid of what I see, I turned round and fell asleep" (Deshpande. *Vine* 139-40).

Often her sexual need makes her crave for Kishore's presence and his absence leaves her better. Sometimes she finds it hard to control her desires and wishes, "I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out, intact and whole, when he returned" (Desshpande. *Vine* 164). In spite of her love for him Urmi asserts her financial independence. She rejects his money for she as a wife expected more than just monetary support. She longs for the emotional security a husband provides to a wife. But such needs leads to frustrations and she is never able to reach his spiritual centre. Some parts of Kishore evade her as she feels, " Kishore will never remove his armour, and there is something in him I will never reach. I have lived with the hope that some day I will" ( Deshpande. *Vine* 141).

Urmi's deep dissatisfaction with the situation between her and Kishore leads to her revolt against the traditional limitations of a wife and assert her needs. In Dr. Bhaskar Jain she finds a friend who understands the emotional upheaval through which she is undergoing after Anu's death. Her husband, Kishore's absence had left her alone to cope with her grief. But Bhaskar, the patient listener understands her emotions and helps her accept her loss. His friendship, which gives Urmi the much-needed companionship, comes to an abrupt end with Bhaskar's open declaration of his love for her. His knowledge of the communication gap between Urmi and her husband makes him hopeful. Even if Urmi is tempted, she could not uproot herself from her traditional background. Besides, her love for Kishore has a firm hold on her marriage. The amount of hurt and trouble her affair with Bhaskar will cause, also makes her choose the simple and respectful life of fidelity. Overcoming her temptations she finds it much simpler "to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife" (Deshpande. Vine 166).

Her rejection of Bhasker for Kishore even if Kishore flits in and out of her life every few months proves that in spite of her dissatisfaction with her marriage she still loves Kishore. Unlike Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Urmi does not give in to temptations to fulfill her physical needs. She is aware of the complications such a move can bring in her life. Thus she lives with the hope that her love for Kishore will bring down the barriers between them. As she feels, "Each relationship always imperfect survives on hope."

Urmi's friend and sister-in-law Vanna fails to understand Urmi's relationship with Bhasker. And Urmi totally objects to Vanaa's submission to Harish. Harish's rationality makes him ignore Vanaa's emotions. Like a

traditional woman Vanaa had learnt to obey her husband's will. Therefore she accepts his decision not to have a third child in spite of her longings for a son. And Urmi who had always viewed understanding as the key to a happy marriage rebukes her by saying "you let him bulldozer- you crawl before him" (Deshpande. Vine 81).

Shashi Deshpande through the characters of Vanaa and Sulu presents the selfless life of women who live a life of servitude because tradition has taught them to do so. Urmi on the other hand, is a rebel who revolts against every tradition that subordinates a woman. She walks on the thin line to balance between tradition in which she was brought up and the freedom that attracts her. And in her marriage, her love makes her dream of achieving happiness.

*A Matter of Time*, Shashi Deshpande's fifth novel is a story of four generations of women belonging to a middle class family. Manorama, the confident matriarch of the first generation came from a humble background. But her self-assurance and intelligence had led to her marriage with the rich Vithalrao. The sudden rise in her status had added to her confidence but she grew insecure when she could not produce a male heir to the family. Vithalrao, however never grudged the birth of his only daughter and no son. But Manorama's knowledge of tradition which, allowed a husband to leave his wife if she gave birth only to daughters, made her fearful of being abandoned for another wife. This insecurity colours her life and as a result she fails to forge a meaningful relationship even with her only daughter, Kalyani.

Her disappointment in her daughter Kalyani, who was average in looks and intelligence, grew with Kalyani's age. A boy's interest in Kalyani

infuriates Manorama who in her domineering way decides to marry her daughter to her brother. Shripati, her youngest brother who was born after Manorama's marriage and their mother died a year after his birth. Shripati's intelligence and ambition had made Vithalrao finance his education and Shripati became a lawyer in Bombay. Manorama forces Shripati into a loveless marriage by appealing to his sense of gratitude to them. She coerces the two into matrimony to prevent the property from going to another family. Thus Kalyani is married to her unwilling maternal uncle, Shripati. And from the beginning there was "the hopelessness that lay within the relationship, that doomed it from the start".

Kalyani's little hope of finding fulfillment in marriage ends the day she lost her son on the railway platform. Unable to control three small children while Shripati had gone to check the train timings, Kalyani lost track of their mentally retarded son, Madhav. Shripati's wild search for him that lasted for three months ended in vain. Abandoned by Shripati, Kalyani returned to her natal home with her two daughters, Sumi and Permi. She lived with her parents hoping to be reconciled to her husband. Manorama's summon to Shripati from her death bed brings him back but the day Kalyani hears about the construction of a room upstairs she realizes the seriousness of Shripati's anger. Manorama's death does not unite the two and an eerie silence engulfs the house and its residents. Shripati agrees to stay in the house but upstairs, so as to end all communication and contact with Kalyani. Blaming her for letting their mentally challenged son walk away, Shripati punishes Kalyani by abandoning her and severing all relations with her. So deep was his resolve that he rarely came down and never interacted with Kalyani, who brought up



their two daughters alone. Shripati's dissociation from his family because of his lost son can also be perceived as his way of rejecting a marriage he was forced into. But his means of getting even with his sister culminates in a life long suffering of the innocent Kalyani. The silence that he adopts as a means of punishing his wife also isolates him from his own family and a life of normalcy. For a time period as long as half a lifetime his only communication with his family was through the bell which he rang whenever he wanted something.

Kalyani, a woman rooted in tradition calls her husband's obstinacy her fate and considers her situation better than widows. She was a married woman even if living in the same house she had not talked or communicated with her husband for last thirty years. Much to the bewilderment of her granddaughter, Arundhati, she carries her husband's name and the mark of matrimony in spite of his desertion. Sumi, her daughter who also returns home after Gopal's walkout questions Kalyani's faith in marriage:

"Is it enough to have a husband, and never mind the act that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifehood make up for everything, for the deprivation of man's love, for the feel of his body against yours, the warmth of his breath on your face, the touch of his lips on yours, his hands on your breasts? Kalyani lost all this (had she ever had them?) but her Kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife" (Deshpande. *Matter* 167).

Shripati's death in an accident ends Kalyani's hopeless marriage. But with him dies her hope of being reconciled. The heart shattering cry of



Kalyani, which Aru hears at night, speaks of the agony and despair of a lifetime wasted due to her husband's stubborn rejection of her.

Gopal's decision to withdraw from his responsibility wrecks the smooth life of Sumi and her three daughters. Helplessly she returns to her natal house to her mother, Kalyani who is shocked at their destinies.

Sumi unlike her mother had a love marriage. In her choice of Gopal Sumi had disappointed her father who had other plans for her life. But Gopal and Sumi find joy in their life together and their early marital life could bring no doubt of their compatibility. Recalling his physical union with Sumi Gopal thinks, "and I knew then that it was for this, this losing yourself in another human being, that men give up their dreams of freedom." (Deshpande. Matter223) Physically and mentally compatible they started a relationship based on understanding and love. The contentment they found in each other's company often makes Permi, Sumi's sister consider theirs an ideal marriage. Gopal's sudden alienation and desertion of the family hurts Sumi. But remembering their vow not to question each other when one felt the need to be free, Sumi accepts his decision in silence and returns home. Her stoical indifference makes Aru, her eldest daughter angry. But unlike the traditional gloom and despair that surrounds a deserted wife, Sumi does not crumble to pieces at the pain and humiliation inflicted on her. She blocks out the sorrow and with confidence she focuses on getting on with life. But it is not as if she is not hurt. She has a last look on her face and she tells Devaki, her cousin, "I've never been able to cry easily, you know that. And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don't know why and may be doesn't really know either? And that I'm angry and humiliated and confused (...)? Let that

be, we won't go into it now." (Deshpande. Matter 10) In spite of her rare breakdowns like this she admirably faces her disgrace but surrounds herself with a deathlike silence. Thus Sumi revolts against the traditions, which made a woman's happiness dependent on marriage. She tries to bring back normalcy in the lives of her children for she wants them to enjoy life and not spite it. She is the only one who understands Gopal but she nourishes one desire:

"If I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one, the question no one has thought of. What is it Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in the age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because, and I remember this so clearly, it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life?" (Deshpande. Matter 27).

These thoughts of Sumi question the traditionally approved Vanaprastha Ashram that permits a man to abandon his responsibility of a householder and embark on his call for renunciation. Sumi presents the inability of a wife to do so. Women who abandon their traditional life revolving around home and family are often characterized as outcasts. However a man's shrinking from his responsibility was traditionally approved in the name of religion. The rejection of marital life by a man consequently leads to deprivation of the physical and emotional fulfillment of his wife. In this context, Y.S Sunita Reddy remarks:

"Episodes from history and mythology bear witness to men who were venerated for their selflessness while no thought was given to the silent suffering and martyrdom of their wives. Laksmana's steadfastness and

devotion finds no parallel in Indian mythology, while Siddharta is hailed for spurning the luxury and comfort of princely life in pursuit of knowledge. Their respective spouses Urmila and Yashodhara, however, remain shadowy figures in the background, doomed to live a life of anonymity and insignificance" (Reddy 115-16).

Through Sumi's writings also Deshpande has raised the issue of female sexuality. Sumi's fascination with the mythical story of Surpanakha makes her question the negation of female sexuality in the patriarchal Indian society. As she says:

"Female sexuality. We're ashamed of owing it, we can't speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it- it is this Surpanakha I'm going to write about." (Deshpande. Matter 191).

She understands the physical needs of a woman as she herself longs for the assuring presence of Gopal and misses the familiar rustling by her side at night. Being alone with him again, when she visits his room she is overcome by a desire to re-establish their old relationship again. But the past months of separation had already brought a distance between them. Their relationship is marred by lack of communication and Sumi perceives an unconscious tension between them. To Sumi, the awareness of the end of their marriage sets as she feels:

"We can never be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged, they now move separately, two different streams" (Deshpande. *Matter* 85).

With this knowledge Sumi revolts by refusing to grieve and starts a new phase of life. She puts her heart and soul into her job and her children. But, even if she is forced in such a situation the disgrace is hers as the society considers it a woman's failure in keeping her husband interested at home. The traditional expectations from a wife are best expressed in the advice of Shankar's mother to Sumi:

"When are you going back to your husband? (...) You should be with him. Look at his state. It's all right to stay with your parents for a while, but that's not your home. When my daughters come home, I don't let them stay long. Go back to your husband, he's a good man. If you've done wrong, he'll forgive you. And if he has-women shouldn't have any pride" (Deshpande. *Matter* 161)

Thus it is also assumed that Sumi is to blame for Gopal's desertion. It is ingrained in the mind of a woman that marriage is her biggest asset and her worth is measured through her marital status. Therefore, Sumi instantly becomes a disgrace woman even if it is Gopal who is disillusioned with life and decides to go in search of his 'self'. In spite of various speculations about Gopal's desertion it is only Sumi who comes, closest to understanding Gopal. She loved and married Gopal when she was eighteen and she had always been aware of his disillusionment with relationship. She reminds Gopal of the

condition he put forth, when she came to his room and they decided to get married, "You said that at anytime if either of us wanted to be free, the other would let go. We are not going to be tied together, you said. No handcuffs, you said. And I agreed. I was only eighteen then and you were twenty-six" (Deshpande. *Matter*221).

Even though Sumi, a girl of eighteen, agreed to it, her love for him could hardly make her think of being separated from him. But Gopal's insistence on leaving an option open for retreat made her realize that the ability to leave was always there in him. Therefore she tells him, she knew exactly when he began to move away and understood that she could not stop him. Their marriage based on perfect understanding shatters with Gopal's alienation and any hope of reconciliation is gone with Sumi's untimely death.

Aru, Sumi's eldest daughter minutely observes the marriages of Manorama, Kalyani and Sumi. She sees Manorama as domineering. Kalyani as enduring and Sumi as indifferent in marriage. With the knowledge of their marital experiences, Aru steps into her womanhood, ready to take life as it comes.

Shashi Deshpande's latest novel *Small Remedies* is the story of love, marriage and betrayal in the lives of three strong women. Madhu Saptarishi, the protagonist unravels for us the lives of Leela and Savitri Bai.

The death of her seventeen-year-old son, Aditya in a bomb blast leaves Madhu in a state of shock and confusion. When she is forced by her friend, Chandru to write a biography of the leading musician Savitri Bai Indorekar, she is unable to refuse. She shifts to Bhavanipur to meet Savitri Bai. Madhu's association with Savitri Bai goes back to her childhood in

Neemgaon when Bai had come to live in the house next door. Bai's life had attracted publishers because she had set an example not only by her music but also by her life.

Introduced to devotional songs by her mother, Savitri Bai's initiation into the world of music was prohibited by her father who reminded her mother of the traditions of their Brahmin family. Married in an orthodox Brahmin family before independence, Savitri Bai was encouraged by her father-in-law to pursue her dream. In spite of furore in the family a female trainer was arranged for Bai and soon a Muslim tabla player joined. But Bai soon realized the limitations of her tutor, who could not help her in fulfilling her dreams of becoming a professional singer. Bai revolts against the traditions by taking a bold step and walking out of her marital home. Ghulam Saab, the Muailim tabla player became her partner and they set up a home in Neemgaon. Much to the shock of the community, Bai, a Brahmin married woman, lived with a Muslim man, out of wedlock. Thus Bai, a revolutionary in her own right defied traditions and chose to live a life of disgrace. Her decision to live with Ghulam Saab made her immoral but the same tradition and society approved of the mistress kept by Bai's father-in-law and even the woman Madhu's father visited in Neemgaon. Through this Shashi Deshpande points at the hypocrisy of our society in recognizing a man's sexuality and negating the same needs in a woman. Ghulam Saab and Bai have a daughter, Munni who becomes the proof of their relationship. But Bai's determination to pursue her ambition even in disgrace shows her courage and strength, which did not fail her even when her character was frequently questioned.

Bai's revolt against her marriage was not because of any problem with her husband. Her dream to be a renowned singer, which could not be fulfilled while she remained the daughter-in-law of an affluent Brahmin family, had made her reject her husband for Ghulam Saab. Ghulam Saab, who recognized her talent and encouraged her, becomes a means for Bai to achieve her aim. As Madhu later recalls, their living together was never a relationship of equals. Ghulam Saab always held the secondary position in the house. Madhu recalls "I've seen the two of them together, she always a little ahead of him, she always the focus of attention" (Deshpande. *Remedies* 176). Bai's interest dominated their life and he devoted his best years to help the woman he so ardently loved. As in the words of Hasina his daughter, "Ghulam Saab was the one who made Bai known. He met people on her behalf, he arranged her programmes, and he made the contacts for her. It was not easy for a woman to do these things then (...). Without Ghulam Saab, Bai would never have been able to manage this part of her professional life"<sup>18</sup> (Deshpande. *Remedies*). Ghulam Saab's sacrifice of his own ambition for the sake of Bai speaks of his love for her.

But Bai's total ignorance of his contribution to her successes when she talks to Madhu shows her desire to attain the respectability she once renounced. Her denial of his help and love which saw her through the rough times makes Madhu, her biographer feel (...) "the other Bai Icsue as well, a calculating, ambitious woman, using the man for her own ends, abandoning him finally when her need for him is over" (Deshpande. *Remedies*).

Thus Bai after attaining success tried hard to regain her lost respectability which only marriage could provide in a traditional Indian

society. As Madhu notices after Ghulam Saab and Munni's disappearance from her life, Bai once again adorned herself with "Mangal Sutra," the symbol of matrimony and respectability for a woman.

Bai's life proves that a woman can never attain respectability by revolting against marriage. As it is a general belief "A woman who had left husband's home what morals would she have, anyway!" (Deshpande. *Remedies* 223). Whereas men like Ghulam Saab after their life with another woman and fathering a child out of wedlock can easily return to their family and deserted wives. And the wives of such men are often left with no choice but to take them back.

Bai's life makes Madhu compare her with her aunt, Leela. Born in a traditional Brahmin family Leela's interest in studies was taken as her defiance against the traditional role of a woman. As a punishment she was married to a man of average income. But her marriage proves to be a boon for her as her husband, Vasant encouraged her to study and fulfill her dreams. However, his sudden death closes all doors of happiness for Leela but once again she refuses to go back to her father's house and takes up a teaching job. While working for the patient of T.B. Leela meets Joe. In spite of their love for each other they wait for fifteen years because of Joe's daughter, Paula's hostility. His feelings for her that stood the test of time made him realize that, "Love is an adult emotion". Their decision to finally marry in spite of their age and their respective families shows the depth of their love. Thus Leela, a Brahmin widow dared to go against traditions and married a Christian. Her family reacts strongly against it and ostracized her. She becomes a rebel and



an example to be given to warn young girls from breaking the traditional norms.

In spite of their diverse backgrounds and interests Joe and Leela find happiness in each other. As Madhu recalls with wonder:

“The strangeness of Joe, a widower with two children, falling madly in love with this woman, a widow, who wore, as Phillo said, ‘ayah saris’- cotton saris from the mills her husband had worked in, saris she was loyal to until the mills themselves closed down. A woman who could speak no English and knew nothing of literature or music, the two great forces in Joe’s life, in addition to medicine. A woman who had, as Joe often said, ‘no sense of humour at all’ (Deshpande. *Remedies*).

Yet they shared a perfect life together with Joe’s time devoted to his T.B. patients and Leela’s to the freedom struggle and social work. The difference in their life style, career and religion did not come as an obstruction in their marriage. While Leela learnt to ignore Paula’s hostility and accept Tony’s love with open arms, Joe whole-heartedly welcomes Madhu, Leela’s niece, in his family and even becomes a father figure for her. Together Joe and Leela create a magical relationship based on perfect understanding and respect for each other’s needs and feelings. Madhu’s contact with them left an impression on her as she speaks of it as, a “wonderful relationship,” “that beautiful companionship” based on love, which transformed not only their lives but her’s and Tony’s too. Leela’s marriage to Joe had brought emotional security to her and Joe. Therefore Joe’s death leaves emptiness in Leela and as Madhu notices, “Something has gone out of Leela, though-a passion, a force, a fire” (Deshpande. *Remedies* 149).

Madhu's association with Joe and Tony introduces her to Som, Joe's student and Tony's friend. Som's regular visit to Madhu's room with Tony and Chandru makes her a part of their friend circle. Som's heart break after being rejected by the beautiful Neelam making him confide in Madhu and soon he begins to see the beautiful person in her. His words, "I want you to be my wife, I want to live my life with you, I want us to have children", (Deshpande. *Remedies* 181) change Madhu's life, for she enters the world of matrimony with him. Marriage brings passion in her life as she discovers her sexuality and her love for Som. Later she recalls, " My delight in him, in what he is doing to me, our delight in each other, the laughter and conversation we indulge in while we're making love, his hands moving all the while, teasingly, tantalizingly over my body- this is passion. It's love too" (Deshpande. *Remedies* 182). Confident and secure in Som's love Madhu rejects the thought of agony and distress in love.

But the love, security and happiness she found with Som and her son, Aditya for seventeen years, is destroyed by her honest confession of an incident of pre-marital sex. A painting in an exhibition brings back to her memory the trauma she went through while her father was on his deathbed. Madhu then fifteen, was shocked to learn that her father, her only guardian in the world was breathing his last. In a state of shock and desolation, she finds comfort in the consoling embrace of one of her father's friends. Guided by an uncontrollable they get carried away by the physical comfort in each other's arms. And the man old enough to be her father later hangs himself due to guilt. Troubled by the knowledge of the man's suicide because of her, Madhu after a nightmare confides her thoughts in Som. The revelation of this secret which

she had locked in the innermost recesses of her mind, shatters Som. Unable to accept his wife's ruined chastity, Som hopes that she was an unwilling partner. But Madhu's honesty in declaring that it was not a rape kills Som's faith in her. Madhu's anxiety over the man's suicide loses its importance as she realizes:

"This is what I'm speaking of to Som, and this is what I'm sharing with him. But it's the single act of sex that Som holds on to, it's this fact that he can't let go of, as if it's been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, and an intact hymen- these are the things Som is thinking of these are truths that matter. I know this when I see his face, when I feel the hurting grip of his hand", when he says, "Tell me, go on, go on" (Deshpande. *Remedies* 262).

Som's obsession with this incident from her past destroys their relationship. Unable to understand that her physical intimacy with that man involved no emotions as she had even forgotten his existence, Som begins to doubt Madhu's character. He questions her relationship with every man she was close to. To Madhu's surprise Som changes from a generous and affectionate husband to " a sad and angry man, distraught, possessed by a madness that seemed to have no end." (Deshapande. *Remedies* 257) Som's allegations in spite of her repeated denial forces her to retreat into silence. His disappointment in loving and marrying girl who had lost her chastity is the result of his traditional beliefs. As N.k Jain points " (...) sexual purity both pre-marital virginal and marital fidelity (...) are cherished Indian values sanctified by tradition and particularly enjoined upon women"<sup>19</sup> (Jain 12). Som's disgust over Madhu's past makes him savage in his lovemaking and

gradually he ceases to touch her. The physical gratification that they sought in each other also disappears and soon their relationship is marred by distrust as he tells her, "If you could keep such a thing from me, how can I believe anything you say, how can I ever believe you again?" (Deshpande. *Remedies* 259).

A brooding silence coupled with hatred replaces the love and understanding between them. Their violent fights trouble their teenage son, who, disgusted with the scene at home walks out, only to meet his death in a bomb blast. With their only son's death, Som and Madhu experience a void in their lives. Their destroyed relationship stops them sharing their grief with each other. And both equally shattered by the loss, struggle to endure the burden of living. In this state of hopelessness Chandru forces Madhu, to write a biography of Savitri Bai. The year that she spends in Bhavanipur makes her accept her loss. The approaching death anniversary of Aditya and Som's letter calling her back home makes Madhu realize that they have to be together to mourn Aditya. They have to live together because their best memories of Aditya can be recreated only by their remembering him together. Thus, *Small Remedies* ends with Madhu's realization that they must recreate happy memories of their Aditya then may be they can overcome the anger that was threatening their marriage. Thus once again they decide to come together to face life with the maturity gained through sorrow.

Apart from the marriage of these three women the novel also explores the marital relationship of Lata and Hari and Tony and Rekha. Both the couples share an understanding that brings joy in their lives in spite of their different backgrounds. They continue their faith as Tony, a catholic and

Rekha, a staunch Hindu respect each other's beliefs. Their recognition of the other's individuality, feelings and aspiration helps them develop a harmony in their marriage.

Almost all of Shashi Deshpande's novels begin with discord and disappointment in marital relationship. An analysis of these marriages reveals that most of the heroines entered into matrimony in order to be rescued from their life of suppression because of the traditional rules and restrictions imposed on the unmarried girls by their parents or guardians. The age-old dream of a girl being chosen by an ideal superior male attracts them to love and marriage. But the suppression in a patriarchal marriage disillusion them. They feel disappointed as the myth of married life denoted by "(...) and they lived happily ever after" is shattered. To most of them love becomes a trap as Sarita, Jaya, Mira and Indu too reject the concept of love calling it "a big fraud, a hoax, that's what it is (...). The sexual instinct (...) that's true. The maternal instinct (...) that's true too. Self-interest, self love (...) they are the basic truths"<sup>20</sup> (Nityanandam 53).

Breaking the illusion of romantic love leading to happiness in life, Deshpande has explored the Indian middle class woman's unhappiness in the institution of marriage. Through the lives of Jaya, Indu, Urmi and Sumi she has depicted the lack of understanding and communication that often mars the relationship. The changing attitude of these women who are educated and intelligent leads to disharmony in their marriage. The traditional male fails to see that the woman also needs to realize her potential outside the domestic sphere. As Mohan and Jayant fail to acknowledge their respective wives' talent and creativity.

Even when not suppressed by dominating husbands, Urmi and Sumi feel an unbridgeable gap, created by their husband's indifference. Both realize that they are ignorant of a part of their husband's personality. If Kishore's life style makes Urmi feel unable to reach his soul, Sumi in spite of her knowledge of Gopal's capability to walk out is unable to understand the reason for his desertion. The lack of communication adds to the inability of the husband and wife to acknowledge each other's needs and this threatens their marriage. In a survey done by *Outlook Magazine* on "What woman want" the results show that to women what matters is "(...) how sensitive a man was to a woman's needs. She expects him to listen to her and treats her as an equal.

The sexual aspect of marriage has been delineated through the lives of Akka, Saru and Mira. It brings in the open Shashi Deshpande's belief that "men do use their power, their sexual power, in order to subjugate women" (Holmstrom 224). Even outside marriage sexual exploitation becomes the intimate means of suppressing women. As in the case of Manu and Prabhakar sexual violence becomes the only weapon to get even with the woman who hurt their pride. A visible boldness in the treatment of sexuality can be seen in Deshpande's novels as not only does she talk about sexual oppression in case of Saru, Mira, Kalpana, and Shakutai, but also focuses on the sexual needs of a woman. Indu, the most vocal of all her heroines speaks of her unfulfilled desires as the root cause of unhappiness in her marriage. Even Jaya and Urmi feel dissatisfied because of their incompatibility with their husbands in sex life. *Outlook Magazine's* survey on "What Women Want" apart from other findings also concludes:

“Good sex, however, was almost unanimously considered important for a good relationship-it was very important even for older women. But, intriguingly, while women expressed a desire for sex, even taking the initiative sexually, as many as fifty five percent of the respondents thought men should be virgin when they marry.” (outlook 43)

Deshpande's main aim in depicting pre-marital or extra-marital sex is not to show the women seeking gratification outside marriage. Rather it stresses the fact that sex without emotional involvement is of little importance. Women seek emotional involvement in any relationship and when emotions are attached to their husbands, their intimacy with other men is just incidental. As Indu and Madhu refuse to give importance to such episodes in their life. Similarly Mira rejects her husband's idea of love, which was limited to sexual gratification.

With the help of women like Kalyani, Sulu, Akka, Shakutai, Jeeja, Inni and Mohan's mother, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the condition of women who are confined to traditions and lead a life of self denial and suffering. All these characters also depict the pre-dominance of marriage in a woman's life. To retain their marital status women have to endure various kinds of suffering throughout their lives. Their lives present the endless sorrow caused by forced incompatible arranged marriages. In spite of the changing treads the options for such women are mostly limited in our society. The life of Savitri Bai shows her craving to attain the lost respectability again. A woman walking out on marriage is still not acceptable to the patriarchal Indian society. As Urmi tells Dr. Bhaskar that marriage even if it does not give

happiness of any kind it is preferred as it gives to the woman especially to those belonging to the lower strata.

Moreover, her novels also show the other side of woman in marriage. Her pre-occupation with the sufferings of middle class women has not blinded her against the power a woman can exercise in marriage. Manorama, Saru's mother, even Jaya's mother, and both her Aji's, represent the domineering women who gradually break their image of suppressed wife and usurp the traditional superior place of their husbands. Even in their power they follow the patriarchal tradition and impose it on their family. The effect on the lives of their children and husbands show that a balance is to be maintained in any marriage. The domination of either can cause imbalance and unhappiness in the family.

Through her writings Shashi Deshpande aims to focus on the importance of family values. The tension created in the husband-wife relationship by the lack of understanding and mutual respect affects the familial relationship. The children often adopt strange behavioural pattern that confuses the estranged parents. Saru's inability to connect with her daughter, Renu, and awareness of tension between her parents show the breaking up of the family unit. Jaya's indifferent attitude as a result of her suppression leads to the alienation of her teenage son, Rahul. This makes her daughter, Rati self-centered. Gopal's desertion of his family becomes the cause of alienation for his daughter, Aru, who is unable to accept the breaking up of their family. But Madhu and Som's doomed marriage causes the most tragic effect on their teenage son, Aditya and the family heads towards self-destruction. Therefore, Deshpande repeatedly calls for understanding and balance in matrimony,



however not at the cost of one's self-respect and individuality. Her novels based on submission and suffering of women do not necessarily end with their rejection of family values and marriage. Her bold and balanced heroines often face the challenges of life confidently. Mostly they return to their husbands with the realization that self-assertion and conformity to one's given role are not necessarily contradictory, but can even be complementary. Thus, the end shows them as women aware of the importance of family and marriage, at the same time, accepting their need to discover their 'self'. Her belief that caste based arranged marriages is not always the key to happiness is highlighted in most of her novels. Through the characters of Joe and Leela she quotes the greatest example of two people of diverse cultures uniting into a blissful bond. She advocates Joe's view of love and calls it, "an adult emotion." In this regard, a notable development in the attitude of her characters from the first novel to the last can be seen. Saru and Indu's immature idea of love and marriage leads to their disillusionment. Whereas Jaya and Urmi seem to have comparatively better understanding of marriage and their own expectations. But Sumi and Madhu present a more adult attitude towards their problems in marital life. Neither do they go hysterical like Jaya nor live in mental turmoil like Saru. They do not succumb to their desires in their state of depression like Indu. their maturity and sensibility that can be also seen in Urmi, makes them deal with their sorrow with dignity.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande's pre-occupation with man-woman relationship has led to her analysis of the institution of marriage in this age of transition. Analysis from a woman's point of view, Deshpande depicts the uneasiness of woman in the traditional role, which expects her to be an

embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, a monument of patience and devotion and a selfless bestowed of love and affection.

In her novels Shashi Deshpande openly talks of a woman's sexuality as a normal aspect of a human being's life. She focuses on the duality in the social system that recognizes a man's biological needs but denies such in a woman.

The theme of marriage and sexuality as traced in Deshpande's novels shows a development from tradition to revolt to affirmation. Her women rebel and marry the man of their choice but ultimately succumb to traditions and the expectations of their husbands. The men often carry the old traditional image of a woman. Therefore they fail to understand the feeling and aspirations of their wives. The intelligent and educated protagonist soon begins to feel restricted in the traditional claustrophobic existence. In this regard Deshpande once remarked, "It is necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy"<sup>21</sup> (Viswanathan 236). But their balanced and practical approach towards life of her heroines makes them realize the importance of marriage and family, concentrating on traditional values. Deshpande almost always shows her women seeking the solution of their problems within marriage. Like lord Krishna in Bhagwad Gita the novelist arms her characters with the knowledge of myriad problems to be faced in matrimony and leaves them to act on their own free will. Instead of walking out her women charged with the knowledge and confidence, strive to make changes in their lives.

Hence Shashi Deshpande's heroines in spite of their conflict with traditions wish to live within the framework of family relationship. Intelligent and well aware of their own individuality, they strive to create a balance. In comparison Anita Desai's over sensitive characters are driven by their loneliness and fail to forge a meaningful relationship. While Desai's heroines succumb to their weakness and find solution in homicide or suicide, Nayantara Sahgal, another contemporary of Deshpande, shows her women defy traditional norms in search of emancipation. Only Deshpande through her works shows women willing to take their share of the blame of their sufferings and bravely face the situation. Through a process of introspection and self-analysis they find a positive solution in the end. Their realization of the importance of family that forms the center of all Deshpande's novels leads them to the path of affirmation rather than rejection. As J.P. Tripathi opines, "(...) Anita Desai or Shobha De, who present disintegrated individualistic pictures of Indian social ethos, show the crumbling of familial bonds under pressures of modernity"<sup>22</sup>(Tripathi 150).

## 6.2 A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF MOVING ON

In the course of writing the present thesis, I was delighted to discover that Sashi Deshpande had published her latest novel *Moving on* (2004). Since a study of the novel was, for obvious reasons beyond the store of the dissertation, I am including a brief analysis of the novel in the concluding chapter. Deshpande's novels are about the possibilities of exploring changes within oneself. Her women protagonists are always willing and receptive for redefining for attitudes and relationships. Shorn of undue romantic embellishments, they want to free themselves from the stultifying traditional concerns and cherish a spontaneous surge towards life. The spontaneity of life arrives only with a cessation of over-eager planning and openness to change - the commonality of this motif is discernible in all her novels. From Sara of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), to Madhu of *Small Remedies* (2000); or more recently, to Manjari of *Moving on* (2004); one can trace the struggle of a woman protagonist to eke out a meaningful definition for her life, to free oneself from the stultifying social constraints and cherish a spontaneous surge toward life.

Her women feel their emotions strongly, yet retain a constant value Judgement, about themselves as well as about other relationships they have to live through. Though they belong to conventional middle class families, they do possess an inner independence to experiment with their life. In the process, life yields self - knowledge, which impart them the strength of accepting that a woman's desire to succeed like an individual is not incompatible with her desire for love or small pleasures of domesticity and relationships within/outside marital frame. In *Moving On* also, she has taken up the theme

of problematic relationships ("the inability or refusal of people to communicate with each other, as marriage partners, parents, friends and lovers is underlined by the intricately meshed structure of novel")<sup>23</sup> as well as of the certainty of change. Manjari comments, "I couldn't have survived if I hadn't changed." (69)

The story lines begin with Manjari's attempts to know about her parents, not as figures she had created in her childhood as pacifiers and comforters she could hug for security, but as real individuals. (21) Simultaneously, her hesitations about the impossibility of ever scrutinizing fully any individual also become apparent, "But can there be any one truth about people? People are complex, undecipherable, protean - there is no absolute about them." (21) In several of her novels, Deshpande has taken up the parent - child relationship. Her portrayal of the mother - daughter relationship can be interesting by juxtaposed against the portrayal of father - daughter relationship. Never eschewing the contemporary context, Deshpande has shown how girls have to put up with victimization from their own mothers and get condemned to a life of bitterness (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Small Remedies*). Her portrayal of father daughter relationship on the hand is sensitive and beautiful. *Come Up and Be Dead*, *That Long Silence*, *Small Remedies* and *Moving On* present a sensitive closeness between the father and the daughter, which imparts tenderness to the themes. Manjari is close to her father, "If Mai's 'no' withstood even Malu's pleas and blandishments, we would ask Baba to intercede for us." (26)

In the "Family Stories," chapter three of the novel, Deshpande presents beautiful pictures of companionship and dependence Manjari has shared with

her father in her childhood. She is protective towards Malu [ " I liked having her depend on me" (46)], rather tentative with Mai ["Yes, I always knew I had to work harder than Malu of I wanted to be loved (44)"] ; but in the company of her father she felt only effervescent joy. The gradual distancing, " a tapering off of bonds, "had come later after Mai's rejection of Shyam, her lover (47). After a long gap of estrangement with her family, Manjari comes to stay with her father during the last few moments of his life. His chemo sessions become the point around which the cycle of their days revolve (60). Life has Changed Manjari during these years. From a lanky teenager who needed everybody's approval and was willing to do anything to please others, she has changed into an assertive middle - aged person, who had to struggle hard to raise her children. She has learnt to be clear about her needs also (70). The unforgivable lapse of the time does not allow the old camaraderie to flourish - absence of Mai and Malu reminds her of things she wanted to forget (60). Gradually however a routine builds up, only to be crumbled soon. Baba's death leaves emptiness within her, compelling her to review the life her parents had led as individuals. In the process it also enables her to re-identify her own self, and place her relationships with her parents, others and self in a better perspective.

The figure of a woman writer, her struggles to publish and be accepted and her concerns about the limitations of her crafts, is again a common phenomenon in Deshpande's novels. Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Madhu in *Small Remedies* are some examples. In *Moving on* also, we have Mai as a writer, " If she recognized her own talent, she knew her limitations, her ability to write only a particular kind of story . Which she did, ensuring herself a steady readership." (126) Like the figures of women authors

in Deshpande's other novels, Mai also does not take her writing ostentatiously. Manjari recalls, " She never, as far I know, publicly proclaimed herself a writer. It was kind of secret business, an activity she did in private, something no one in the family ever spoke of." (121) She is shown as a popular fiction writer, creating images of happy romance, large families, satisfaction of living through conventional roles. One of her stories is converted into a movie also. Her behaviour though is dictated by the conventional gender stereotypes. She is always meticulous to give her husband a "paramount place in the house " mutterin " *Annadata sukhi bhava* " after every meal (122). In her essay " Masks and Disguises," Deshpandey has talked about the disguises women authors normally take up one of the disguises which Deshpande's own mother had taken up proudly was to keep nothing of herself in her writing"<sup>24</sup>. Making a cipher of herself is also the justification Mai has taken up for an activity which regarded perhaps " not only as being outside her domain, but worse something that could be called selfish and self-indulgent."<sup>25</sup> " Thinking of Mai. Manjari always comes up against " a blank wall, an enigmatic silence " (102), she could manage the professionalism of sending her stories before the magazines' deadline. Through her readings of her father diaries, Manjari for the first time comes face to face with the writer self of her mother, and also comes to know of her sexual frigidity, her abhorrence for the naked flesh . Her mother was incapable of responding to her husband's sexual passions, and therefore found Manjari a complete mystery when she so desperately wanted Shyam. (109) Her father comments in one of his dairy entries, " But I understood Jiji, oh yes, I did . As a father, I found it hard to be a witness to the raw sexuality of my daughter's feelings for a man, something Jiji almost

flaunted. But as a man, I could understand her feelings for a man, something Jiji almost flaunted. But as a man I could understand her feelings only too well". (109) Insights gained from her forages into the past of her parents' need to be individuals: how valuable freedom from the role of '*aamchi Mai* ' was to her mother (125). It also helps her to correct her perspective about her own spurning of her parents after Shyam's suicide.

*Moving On* underlines the societal expectations from women while living through their various roles. Manjari's understanding of Mai, before she goes through the diaries, is symptomatic of a social/stereotypical understanding of the image of a mother.

" The traditional Indian concept of motherhood easily translates into a willing tolerance of a life of sacrifice, suffering and exploitation. Traditions encourage mothers to sublimate " a whole series of natural urges or least believing that she should endeavour to do so.<sup>26</sup> "In their roles mothers and wives, women are expected to possess archetypal fortitude and follow an intensively rigid moral pattern of life. The possibility of individual choices is not discussed even theoretically. In *Moving On* too, the children's behaviour towards their mother is a product of this unconscious social conditioning. It is reflected not only in Manjari's attitude, but also in Sachi's attitude towards Manjari, " But Sachi, I remember, has always wanted me to be what I'm not, not to be what I am. ' Why can't you be like other mothers? ' She'd asked me once." (209) Deshpande also depicts how marriage is treated as the final destiny for girls. Recalling her childhood Manjari comments, " we would all of us take the right path, leading us to our final destinies of becoming good wives and mothers." (93) For a wife, self - effacing norms are exalted to create



an environment, which pressurize women to mould themselves according to their husband's needs. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu is afraid of becoming such an ideal wife. In *Moving On* we have figures of Kamla, Medha and Mangal - Kamla does not let BK indulge in Condes consiear any household chore. Soft, docile and silent (93), she even serves him drinks with averted face; Medna keeps pace with the widening social needs of Bharat Magal transforms herself into a mother figure to become the public face of her husband Laxman (171), silently putting up with beatings and ill - treatment (174). Gender conditioning makes women vulnerable and silent but it is a double - edged sword. Among men it generates an intolerance or condensation towards women's attempts at individuality. Patriarchal traditions make men aloof, occupying a privileged position, able to realize their potential within the total gamut of society, whereas women are expected to submit themselves passively, doing nothing outside their dependence on the breadwinner. Deep - rooted indoctrination of a patriarchal society corrupts the objectivity of psyche. Manjari's father, though a liberal person in many ways fails to empathize with her wife, and takes her work with a non - serious, nonchalance; treating it as a pastime to occupy her in her spare time (197). After Shyam's tragic death, Manjari spurns her parents. Through a minor character Roshan, Deshpande also hints at the possibility of overcoming social conditioning through the bonds of sisterhood among women themselves, a concept used by many African-American women writers effectively. Roshan helps Manjari to settle down in life, shaking her out of her apathy and hopelessness. (221)

In her novels, Deshpande has taken up the theme of women's sexuality, within and outside marriage. A friendly and intimate male-female relationship

outside marriage is often presented by Deshpande not as matter of choice, but of compulsion. In her interview with Pallavi Thakur Deshpande has commented that such relationship gives or woman the freedom to be herself and that it need not be necessarily an affair. In *Moving On* she has depicted a close relationship between Manjari and Raja, which has the openness and trust of mature friendship. Simultaneously she has portrayed Manjari's purely physical association with her tenant Rajan. To some extent it can be compared with the relationship of Indu and Naren in *Roots and Shadows*, where Indu had succumbed to her bodily desires. Manjari is also crippled by her physical needs and wants to treat it "like drinking water when you're thirsty." But it also draws her into ethical dilemma, "Like a diabetic's craving for food. Nothing wrong with it. And yet, why do I bathe three times a day, why do I scrub myself when bathing as if I want to flay myself, why do I punish my body so angrily? The body and mind so much at variance with each other." (259) This episode is dealt with at a purely physical level. When Raja confronts her with it, Manjari is quite open about her sexual hunger. Disclosure of Raman's criminal association compels her to put an end to this relationship.

Another recurring theme of Deshpande's novels, which has been repeated in *Moving On* also, is of introspection and confronting the past, as only after it the process of amelioration can begin. Manjari's stay at her father's house gives her precisely such an occasion. She constantly reminiscences about Malu, Shyam, Mai, Baba, Raja, her children - above all she wants to find her own self, solve out her own inner intricate knots. She gets the same message in her father's diary, "I hope that some day the

pointlessness and emptiness of her life will force her into confronting her past. " (304) Ultimately she gets rid of her anger, guilt and loneliness, and learns to reach out to other human beings. She realizes that life carries its own truth within it, and in order to change one's circumstances, they have to be accepted. Deshpande emphasizes an analysis of one's predicament and overcoming it with rational resolutions. Manjari also reaches this conclusion towards the end: " There's always a fork in a road, there's always a choice we have make. It 's no use going back, agonizing over the choice we made, imagining what would have happened if we' d taken the other road. " (311) She shares her tortuous past with Raja, forgives Shyam and decides to communicate freely about her past to the children - her son Anand and Malu's daughter Sachi. She realizes that life is a mixed yarn of happiness, tragedy and villainy; and this mixture alone imparts it a charm. The novel ends on a hopeful note. Like the protagonist of her other novels, Deshpande also concludes that chaos, fear and disintegration do not stop life; it simply moves on, "We know that the wicked stepmother and the bad fairy won't have it all their own way. We know that there's still one good fairy to come - the damage control mechanism at work, goodness coming back into the arena to fight wickedness. " (325) The search may be doomed to failure, yet "the search is what it's all about the search is the thing. " (343)

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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# CHAPTER 7

## 7.1 LANGUAGE AND STYLISTICS

Before concluding this present dissertation. I would like to analyse Deshpande's Unique and spontaneous narrative style and language and show how she uses this spontaneity to present and express the issues. She is concerned with in her novels. Among the other novelists experimenting consciously with the Indian writing in English, Shashi Deshpande has a unique place: "One of the problems I've had to face as a writer is the isolation one works in when one writes in English in India-an isolation that is emphasized when one is a woman...for me the problems amounted to this: there was nothing, nobody I could model myself on... I could only tell myself, I don't want to write like this, not like this, not like this..."

Shashi Deshpande, "*The Dilemma of the Writer*"<sup>1</sup>

By 1996, when *A Matter of Time* was published in India, Shashi Deshpande had seven novels, four books for children, more than eighty short stories, and a screenplay to her credit, making her one of the most published women writers in English in contemporary India. Her books are available in much of the Western world, either in English or in translation, and she is the recipient of a string of literary awards, including the prestigious national Sahitya Akadei Award in 1990 for her novel *That Long Silence*.

Yet she remains curiously 'invisible' in her own perception, as well as that of the general public. At a time when a writer's stature seems to be determined by the number of column inches she gets in newspapers and periodicals and the amount of media attention her new work attracts, Deshpande's presence is low-key. Although her work has been published in English in India and the United Kingdom and has been translated into



German, Russian, Finnish, Dutch, and Danish, she still doesn't attract the critical or popular attention that writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, or even Ruth Praver Jhabawala do. This is only partly explained by her location- distant from media capitals of Bombay and Delhi and her own modest, almost reclusive, lifestyle. Much more likely an explanation is the fact that she is almost completely 'homegrown', a writer so rooted in her reality and her social and culture milieu as to feel "alienated" from what she refers to as the Westernized literary landscape of English writing in India. " I am different from other Indians who write in English," She said in an interview with translator and editor Laxmi Holstrom in 1993. "My background is very firmly here. I was never educated abroad, my novels don't have any Westerners, for example. They are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives... My English is as we use it. I don't make it easier for anyone, really."<sup>2</sup> Elaborating on this five years later, she said to me that "All those writers writing in English then- R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandeya- were totally alien to my feelings as an Indian writer... I had no desire to feel any literary kinship with them. " Explaining what she meant by "alienated", she went on to say that their world was "not my world", that what they created was seen from a certain "angle" that didn't allow a sense of intimacy either with the place or people.

"Now when I think of it I realize that (this writing) was intended for a Western readership. So when I started writing I certainly was not using them as my role models. I had no role models. My path was totally unliterary, in one sense, because I was not a student of literature, so

writing was never a literary exercise, it was just a means of self-expression".<sup>3</sup>

Narrative techniques apart, the most obvious challenge for the Indian writer in English is the use of English language in a way that will be distinctively Indian, and yet remain English. Though Indian writing in English has come to stay, the propriety of Indian writers using English is still debated upon. Raja Rao in his 'preface' to *Kanthapura* declares: "We can not write like the English. We should not". The problem of the Indian English novelist is, indeed, unique. He or she writes in English about people who don't normally speak or think in English. In order to overcome this problem, novelists have made different experiments with language. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, these experiments can be classified under three heads, "Experiment in diction (literal translation of idioms), experiments in syntax (changing the structure of sentences) and imagery".<sup>4</sup>

Literal translation has been most consciously tried by Mulk Raj Anand who has no inhibitions of taking liberties with the English language in spite of the disapproval of reviewers and critics. Literal translations of Hindi and Panjabi phrases like "Are you talking true talk?" or "to make one's sleep illegal", are generously spread across his stories. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her book, *The Twice-Born fiction*, has made a list of some of the Punjabi and Hindi idioms used by Anand in his works, some of it which may sound atrocious to those not familiar with either of these languages. For example, 'eating the air' (to take a stroll), 'breaking the vessel' (to expose a secret), and 'black in the pulse' (something wrong). Anand's works are also liberally

sprinkled with swear words and words of abuse, which of course are not out of place in stories mostly about the Punjab peasantry.

Khushwant Singh also translates many Punjabi phrases and proverbs into English. Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels are full of liberal translations of Bengali proverbs, while Raja Rao's novels are full of translations of Kannada sayings. R.K. Narayan, perhaps, is the only one among the older generation who did not feel the need to use either any Indian translations of words and phrases nor original English text book phrases. Among the later novelists, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Kamala Markandaya have managed to use the English language without distorting it with unseemly translations of words and phrases or coining of new compound words like 'that-house-people' or 'next-house-woman's kitchen'. Shashi Deshpande belongs to the new breed of English writers who suffer from no complexes about using English because most of them don't even consider it a foreign language. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee: "Earlier, English was the language of public discourse, of higher education. It is only for a section of those born in the 1950s and after, that English is the first language, some times their only language. They display a careless intimacy with English, which enables them to play with it."<sup>5</sup>

Deshpande's writing is unplanned and quite spontaneous. Replying to Vanamala Vishwanath's observation that her writing is obviously Indian does not draw attention to itself, Deshpande replies:

No, I don't believe in making it obviously Indian. But all this is basically because I'm isolated-I'm not part of any movement and not conscious of readers to impress. To get wider recognition here and abroad, you have to be in the university and places like that with the

right contacts. I'm an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home. None of these things are within my reach. This has, I believe, done me good. It has given me great freedom. I'm happy with this anonymity. Once you get publicity-conscious, your writings become affected. I'm truly happy with this freedom."<sup>6</sup>

Deshpande, however, feels that writing in English in this country is a drawback because it alienates the writer from mainstream. She seems to solve this problem by considering English, not a foreign language, but one of the Indian languages, she says:

"I believe that English writing in this country is a part of our literatures; I consider English as one more of our *bhashas* as Ganesh Devy calls them I know them I know that our writing comes out of an involvement with this society, out of our experiences here, over relation ship is now here, and happily our publishers are here as well, yet, I am disturbed by the recent trend in English writing which in its pursuits of role model outside, is alienating itself from its roots".<sup>7</sup>

She feels that by writing in English she belongs to a small circle like the regional language writers and therefore, does not feel that it makes her non-Indian. In any way she doesnot categoried as Indian-English She says: "I am an Indian writer. My language just happens to be English, which cannot be called a foreign language at all because it is so much used in India."<sup>8</sup>

Deshpande also very categorically rejects the use of Indian translations in her works to provide an Indian flavor, which was considered so essential by most of the earlier writers. She says: "I don't use indianism to make my writing look Indian. I never try to make India look exotic. I don't think of a

Western audience at all. I belong to Indian literature. I would not like ever to be called an Indo-Anglican writer. I feel strongly about that"<sup>9</sup>

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the problem faced by the Indian writers in English but feels that writers should work out their own language. She expresses happiness with the present breed of Indian writers in English whose writing seems to be aimed at Indian readers more than Western. She is also happy that the present day writers seem to have got away from the obsessions with East-West conflict, which has little relevance today. Deshpande, however, admits to failure at times to express the right emotion in a language alien to the characters she creates. She says: "I lose the range of nuances which are available in Marathi, for example, the richness of the phrases that make up that language".<sup>10</sup>

Deshpande's mind is ever alert to the issues related to contemporary society, and she has evolved literary skill in a manner, which enables her to present these issues realistically. It is small wonder if the *Times Literary supplements* showered praises on her creative use of language: "Deshpande eschews linguistic pyrotechnics and formal experimentation, but has sufficient command of her tradition to give the lie to the belief that the English language is incapable of expressing any Indian world other than a cosmopolitan one".<sup>11</sup>

Shashi Deshpande came to writing quite late in her life, and she came to it by accident. Thirty years old and in England, where she had accompanied her husband for a year, she was encouraged by him to write about all they had seen and done so that she would not forget it. She began putting her experiences down on paper and sent her articles to her father, who in turn sent them on to the Deccan Herald, a Southern Indian newspaper. Much to her

surprise, they published her pieces and almost without her knowing it, her writing career had begun. "It was only much later that it struck me how discontented I had been with my life" she told me. "Not unhappy, just discontented. Everything changed after I started writing..."

Three factors in her early life shaped Deshpande as a writer: her father, Adya Rangacharya, was one of the most well known Kannada writers of his time; she was educated exclusively in English; and she was a woman.<sup>12</sup> Born in 1938 in Dharwar, a small town in the Southern Indian state of Karnataka, she grew up surrounded by books and literary personalities. Their house was redolent with an atmosphere of discussions, of tea time conversation on book and ideas, a place where play reading and rehearsals took place all the time. "I was happily submerged in it", she recalls<sup>13</sup>. Although the family could be defined as a typical middle-class professional and scholarly one, in actuality it was rather unconventional for the times. Her parents did not belong to the same region or community. Her mother came from an affluent family in Maharashtra in Western India, and their marriage was most unusual. In a country where marrying outside your class and community is still frowned upon, the fact that her parents had an arranged marriage that transgressed there norms was most remarkable. They didn't speak the same language.

Like many educated Indians Deshpande is fluent in at least three languages and comfortable in four or five. Her parents' "mixed marriage" meant she spoke both their languages, Kannada and Marathi, she learned Sanskrit because it was her father's specialization; and her English language education ensured that she was exposed to the best that English had to offer. This trilingualism worked in a most complicated way: as children, Shashi and

her sister spoke to their mother and each other in what was literally their mother tongue, Marathi, and to their father and brother in Kannada. It was when they were much older that all three children adopted English as their language, and it is only now, years later, that Deshpande herself has been able to reconcile her Kannada and Marathi heritage.

Despite the unconventional decision to send their daughters to a missionary school rather than a local school, Deshpande's parent's household was by no means a Westernized one, Sanskrit classics and the Kannada greats were as much an influence as Ibsen and Shaw, and, she recalls, "if in school we did Wordsworth and Tennyson, at home we had to learn Amarkosa by heart"<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, English prevailed, and it is in English that she thinks and writes. Because she never studied in any of the other languages she speaks, she never used them as "working tools"; to try to write creatively in them, then, would be to presume too much.

The question of the language in which a writer chooses to write in a multilingual culture like India is fraught with contradiction, and it would be impossible to address it in all its complexity within the scope of this afterword. But it lies at the heart of every debate on indigenous versus alien, authentic versus fake, Westernized versus "India", even traditional versus modern. The much greater visibility of writers writing in English, now a world language with worldwide readership, lends an even sharper edge to the discussion. At the same time, it places the writers themselves in a bittersweet relationship with other writers in their own country.

Consider the ironies: India has twenty-two officially recognized languages each of which has an old and venerable literary and critical



tradition, and a history of sophisticated scholarship and publishing. Colonial rule implemented English language education in the nineteenth century, a fact that has made for an unalterable-albeit poignant- reality: although it is equally foreign to every single Indian, English nevertheless functions as a link-language for all. It is the language of higher education, science and technology, and commerce. Increasingly, it has also become a literary language in its own right, elbowing its way into the literary pantheon in India.

Only two percent of Indians read and write English, but its importance in the cultural life of the country has grown steadily. Its much greater international access and exposure places it in an asymmetrical relationship with all other Indian languages, so that the decision to use it creatively is a much more overtly political act than choosing regional language would be, writers contend with issues of representation, of using the colonizer's language, of cultural baggage, of the translatability of the local and native, and, lastly, with the question of voice.

Especially over the last ten or fifteen years, young Indians writing in English have flashed across the world's literary horizon and, in a way, have intensified the spotlight on these questions. Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee, Githa Hariharan, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Manjula Padmanabhan, Vikram Seth, Anjana Appachana, Allan Sealy, and Shashi Deshpande, among others, have forced literary and commercial establishment to reckon with what is sometimes called Indo-Anglican writing. The fact that these writers have won literary acclaim and have been commercially successful has, in turn, resulted in a somewhat unfortunate and unhappy comparison with writing in other Indian languages. The old question



of who represents whom-and what and how- has become both acrimonious and troubled. None of the writers mentioned (and none of the many others not listed here) has ever admitted to being seriously disadvantaged because he or she writes in English- although Deshpande has said that she "regrets enormously that I was cut off from my own languages and literature". And most of these writers would concur with Deshpande's statement "English writing in this country is part of our literature"<sup>15</sup>. The fact that an unmistakable cachet is attached to it goes without saying. The international notice and exposure writers' gain by publishing in English adds enormously to their visibility and marketability. Being published in; literary magazines like *Granta* or *The New York* or by literary presses like Faber And Faber, Cape, Bloomsbury, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, or Random House immediately guarantees a readership that runs into tens of thousands, and often has literary agents knocking at their doors. All this is in addition to the obvious financial gains. What also follows, however is that choice of language to some extent determines the subject matter to some extent: most contemporary Indian writing in English is preoccupied with the life and times of the urban middle class and, willy-nilly, the label Westernized manages to stick.

Deshpande is quite clear that, for her, finding her own voice meant not just a woman's voice but a literary voice of her own: no magic realism, no concessions to "marketability", no themes or situations that pander to a so-called Western audience, not adapting her style to what a target readership might prefer. One will not find in her novels any element of the "exotic", a *National Geographic-land-and-its-people* kind of treatment of the unfamiliar. Rather than serve up a dish that experiments with the spices of the Orient,

Deshpande assumes her readers' familiarity with the everyday ingredients of her offerings, relying upon their fresh, home-cooked flavor to have readers asking for more. Her writing style is marked by absence of flamboyance or literary flourish. Nor does she beguile us with Merchant Ivory-like gloss on "Indian culture". So, she has never, for example, felt any disjunction between her social self and her literary self, of the kind that critics have noted in other Indian women writers writing in English <sup>16</sup>. Part of the reason for this, she thinks, in her small-town origins. Growing up in Dharwar, where she lived until she was fourteen years old, made the difference. "*A city shapes you differently,*" she maintains. "*A small town never leaves you.*" Thus, locale has a very definite function and meaning in all her novels, and although no specific place may be named, its evocation can quite clearly be traced back to her childhood homes. So Saptagiri and the flat in Dadar (Bombay) in *That Long Silence*, Bangalore in *A Matter of Time*, and the ancestral villages that figure so prominently in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *A Matter Of Time* are not just any geographical locations. They are the matrix from which her characters, particularly her female characters, spring, and they form an essential part of "*the kind of people they are*". And, indeed, the kind of people they are is the kind one would easily find in any medium-sized town in India: "ordinary people," Deshpande says, "*people like you and me going about their daily business*". Teachers, lawyers, doctors, an occasional accountant or banker, they are modest and unassuming-far removed from the flash of MTV and designer shoes. In a sense, they are the heart of middle Indian.

It is widely accepted that "The novel is the readiest and most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of our

time".<sup>17</sup> The manner in which to write a good novel, however, remains highly debatable. Many modern critics believe that in the past too much attention was paid to the story or plot overlooking psychological aspects. Some modern novelists have written novels that are experimental and far removed from the traditional story-telling methods. According to Somerset Maugham, these writers who are dubbed anti-novelists, "Consider the telling of a story for its own sake as a debased form of fiction"<sup>18</sup>. The principal features of the anti-novelist, according to Paul Verghese, are "lack of an obvious plot; diffused episode; minimal development of character; detailed surface analysis of objects; repetition; experiments with vocabulary, punctuation and syntax, variations of time sequence, alternative ending and beginnings."<sup>19</sup>

The narrative technique employed by the novelist is also gaining importance, considering the gradual increase in the different methods of story telling. Plain narrative or story telling is still the most common method employed by the novelist who is omnipresent and omniscient in this type of writing. The first person narrative is usually employed by the novelist to make his story appear more realistic and more credible. While novels written in such a manner have a ring of authenticity to them, they do not enable the novelist to look deep into the minds and motives of the rest of the characters. Shashi Deshpande overcomes this problem by using a combination of the first person and third person narrative coupled with flashback devices to lend force and realism to the novel. A chronological analysis of Deshpande's development as a novelist requires a keen study of the narrative technique employed by her, beginning with her first full length novel, *Roots and Shadow*. The novel essentially deals with the protagonist Indu's painful self-analysis. The author

also tries to encompass several other themes in this slim novel. Apart from the obvious and central theme of Indu's relentless probing to discover herself, there is the theme of bohemianism in the person of Naren in stark contrast to the middle-class values of Indu's family. There is the theme of woman's fate in general which is brought to the reader's notice, unobtrusively, in the form of Indu's observations. There is also the theme of the old order giving way to the new- symbolized by the demolition of the old house to construct a hotel. As Shama Futehally observes: "This slender novel attempts, in way, to encompass too many themes, and is unable to develop them beyond making reflections on each which are almost in the nature of asides"<sup>20</sup>. Other critics like Madhu Singh, however, are highly appreciative of her skill in interweaving myriad themes into a coherent whole. Comparing *Roots and Shadows* with *That Long Silence*, Madhu Singh points out that the former "Is the more powerful of the two. In its succinctness lie its strength and the punch"<sup>21</sup>.

To capture the interest of the reader, Deshpande avoids the simple technique of straightforward narration, and instead employs the flashback method. While the first chapter deals with the present, the later chapters move backwards in time, culminating in the final chapter, which again ends in the present. This convoluted narration has come in for some criticism by reviewers who feel that it has only contributed to creating confusion in the minds of readers. For instance, Shama Futehally comments: "This is a device which is useful either when some element of suspense is needed, or for a novel with a non-narrative structure. For this novel chronological clarity is essential, as the reader already has to cope with an abundance of characters and their

complex interactions. The first chapter, where we are faced with all of them simultaneously, and without introduction, is rather confusing." The entire novel is written in the first person, the narrator being a young woman writer who returns to her childhood home and finds herself caught in the whirlpool of family intrigues. Seen through the eyes of a young woman with liberated and progressive ideas, ordinary everyday incidents acquire a new meaning and highlight the gross inequalities in society. The first person narration also allows the author to probe deep into the mind of the protagonist, exposing her fears and frustrations with admirable candour, inviting the praise of reviewers like C.W. Wastson, who compares Deshpande to the master story teller, Chekhov:

"Other South Indian writers have been compared to Chekhov, but Shashi Deshpande, in this novel at least, comes closest to that writer, and the tragi-comedy of *The Cherry Orchard* is constantly recalled in the description of the crumbling house and the squabbling of the family. The writing is beautifully controlled and avoids the temptation of sentimentality, which the subject might suggest and again the control is reminiscent of Chekhov"<sup>22</sup>.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is commendable for its honest portrayal of the psychological problems faced by the protagonist, Sarita, a career woman, achieves a rare level of authenticity because of the use of a double perspective-the shifting of the narrative from the first person to the third person in every alternate chapter. When asked by Lakshmi Holmstrom in an interview as to how she had hit upon this technique, Deshpande replied:

The present is in the third person and the past is in the first person. I was doing it throughout in first person stories. But that's often a perspective I use in my short stories. I wanted to be more objective. So then I tried it in the third. But it wouldn't work at all. Yet I really needed to distance myself from the narrative in the present, otherwise it was going to be far too intense. And then I read an American novel by Lisa Alther where she uses this method. And the minute I came across her novel thought-let me admit it freely- Oh god, this is how I am going to do my novel"<sup>23</sup>.

This is how the novelist manages to tell the story objectively, and at the same time, "No summary will do justice to the intricate web the author has woven through the superimposition of the past over the present, through dreams, nightmares, flashback, introspection and simple straightforward third person narration"<sup>24</sup>.

The Sahitya Akademi Award winning *That Long Silence* is a complex novel of despair and triumph, of suppression and freedom, all played out for the better part in the heroine's mind through memories and recollections? The narrative with its slow unknitting of memories and unravelling of the soul reads like an interior monologue quite similar to the stream of consciousness technique employed by the likes of Virginia Woolf. A particularly bad patch in the narrator's life makes her bring alive her past through ruminations. Prema Nanda kumar, however, maintains that the novel "is not a forbidding stream of consciousness probe in the Virginia woolf tradition. It is very much a conventional tale full of social realism evoked by links of memory. Not misty recollection but clear-eyed story telling"<sup>25</sup>. The narrator achieves a kind

of catharsis by an objective analysis of what went wrong with her marriage and why she had failed as a writer. According to the reviewer Rita Joshi: "The method is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett in plays such as *That Time* where the character sits centre stage while three voices go over his past"<sup>26</sup>. The technique is, perhaps, best described by the narrator Jaya herself, who is telling her own story: "All this I've written-it's like one of those multicolored patchwork quilts the *Kakis* made for any new baby in the family. So many bits and pieces- a crazy conglomeration of sizes, shapes and colours put together"<sup>27</sup>

The intense interiority of her early novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*-and her use of the first person for female protagonists weave a web of intimacy around the reader, an effect that is enhanced by her near total focus on the domestic-the almost mundane. "I was born," says Jaya in *That Long Silence*. "My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live. Maybe this is enough to start off with". This is an almost eerie echo of her creator's sentiments, and indeed Jaya is the character who Deshpande feels corresponds most closely to herself "A lifetime of introspection went into this novel," Deshpande writes, "The most autobiographical of all my writing, not in the personal details, but in the thinking and ideas". Later in the novel, Jaya comments directly on the writing process:

Perhaps it is wrong to write from the inside. Perhaps what I have to do is see myself, us, from a distance. This has happened to me before; there have been times when I've had this queer sensation of being detached and distant



from my own self. Times when I've been able to separate two distinct strands, my experience and my awareness of that experience.

This twinning of "myself" with "us", of being "inside" with "being detached and distant from my own self," this alternative of the first person with the third, simultaneously allows Deshpande never to leave the homeground on which she is most comfortable, and creates the double perspective that is a characteristic of all her novels.

*The Binding Vine* differs in its mode of narration from her earlier novels. The narrative structure in *Roots and Shadow*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* does not progress chronologically, but instead moves back and forth thematically, gradually relating one incident after the other until the entire story is revealed. In *The Binding Vine*, however, individual plots of three different stories are interwoven bringing together three women separated by age, status and education. Urmi narrates the entire story in the first person. To offer deep and intimate glimpses into the life of the narrator's mother-in-law, Mira, Deshpande uses the poetry and writing in her diary and notebooks. Urmi is able to brilliantly recreate the story of Mira—her unspoken anguish and outrage at being subjected to rape within marriage.

*Small Remedies*, Deshpande's most latest novel, works at different levels—the personal, the worldly, women's rights, communal violence, motherhood etc. it vacillates between the present and the past, delving into the lives of Savitribasi, Leela, Munni, and the narrator Madhu herself. It is structured as a biography within a biography, with the writer, Madhu, often in a dilemma about how to tell her story. She wonders if a biography is an exercise in truth telling, and if it is, whose version must it be?



In all her novels, Deshpande seeks to faithfully reflect life as it almost is without resorting to any personal commentary and explanation. Her novels, dealing as they do with women's oppression, are highly susceptible to feminist harangue. But, it is a rare achievement that she has not fallen a prey to this temptation. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand, who takes pleasure in being called a propagandist, Deshpande protests against her work being labelled 'propaganda.' She vehemently denies any attempt on her part to moralise as is evident from what she says in an interview to Sue Dickman: "somebody once asked me if I have a social purpose in my writing and I very loudly said 'No', I have no social purpose. I write because it comes to me."<sup>29</sup>

In another interview to Stanley Carvalho, she once again emphatically states: "I hate to write propagandist literature. I think good literature and propaganda do not go together. Any literature written with some viewpoint of proving something rarely turns out to be good literature. Literature comes very spontaneously and when I write I am concerned with people"<sup>30</sup>. She takes pains to explain that her writing merely mirrors the world. She finds that a lot of men are unsympathetic to her writing while a lot of women are sympathetic. The reason for this, according to her, is not difficult to analyse because in her writing, "women see a mirror image and men see, perhaps, a deformed image of themselves."<sup>31</sup>

But, as she matured as a writer, Shashi Deshpande has undergone a change of outlook regarding the scope of committed writing in literature. This is made clear when she candidly admits:

There was a time when I was scornful of what is called committed writing. I considered such writing flawed because its being message-oriented

diminishes its artistic worth. But now I know that all good writing is socially committed writing, it comes out of a concern for the human predicament. I believe, as Camus says, that the greatness of an artist is measured by the balance the writer maintains between the values of creation and the values of humanity.

It must be observed that Deshpande makes a sparing use of irony, satire or even humour that are the ingredients of great works of art. Flashes of irony are evident in one or two incidents in a couple of novels but they do not seem to be included intentionally by the writer. The most obvious example which comes to mind is the scene in *That Long Silence* where Mohan, Jaya's husband, accuses her of avoiding him during the crucial period when they are in hiding because of the fear of corruption charges being levelled at him. It is during this period that Jaya herself is facing a traumatic time and needs support. Her husband's accusation, therefore, seems highly ironical and throws her off balance for sometime. She keeps telling herself:

I must not laugh, I must not laugh... even in the midst of my rising hysteria, a warning bell sounded loud and clear. I had to control myself, I had to cork in this laughter. But it was too late. I could not hold it any longer. Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as rocked helplessly. (122).

She is able to regain her sanity only after decides to break her silence and record her story.

Another example of Deshpandes attempt at irony is her creation of the character, Priti, in *The Binding Vine*. Priti who at best can be called a psuedo-feminist provides a foil to the ever-serious Urmi. Urmi's compassion for her

long dead mother-in-law, Mira, makes her want to set Mira's random writings to order and publish them. But Priti is more interested in the sensation which Mira's story is likely to create and plans to adapt her life into a film. Her reaction to Kalpana's tragedy also borders on hypocrisy because she is more concerned about the publicity, which the case is sure to generate. The reviewer Shreya Cheravuri, however, feels that Deshpande's novels could do without such devices because, as she says, "Deshpande's style is essentially too straightforward for satire and thus in parts, the book lacks a certain elegance"<sup>32</sup>

Deshpande also, by her own admission, steers clear of sentiment and romance. Speaking at a similar, she expresses her annoyance at not being taken seriously by publishers. One publisher happened to reject her story and advised her to send it to a woman's magazine instead. This irked her and she began to wonder: "why did the editor say that? It was a good story. I knew that. I was pretty confident about it. It was not a sentimental, romantic love story either, the kind that would fit snugly into a woman's magazine"<sup>33</sup>. Deshpande probably feels that romance, sentimentality, and other such features merely diminish the serious concerns of a novel.

The use of myth is also recognized as an important literary device to enhance the artistic effect of the novel. While English poets and writers have relied heavily on Christian, Pagan and classical myths, Indian writers in English have derived inspiration from the wealth of material available in the form of stories from *the Ramayana*, *the Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* and also local legends and folklore. The most often used symbol from Indian mythology, of course, is Sita, who is considered to be the ideal woman- patient

and submissive. Indian writers in English and other languages also draw many other parallels liberally from Indian mythology.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande draws a parallel from the Dhruva story to highlight the sense of neglect experienced by Saru, whose parents show a blatant preference for her brother, Dhruva. Saru's father also tells her how on her death bed her mother had made him repeat the episode of Duryodhana's hiding in the lake at the end of the battle, waiting for the Pandavas to come and kill him. Saru identifies herself and her mother as Duryodhana figures-both lonely, unloved, defeated and filled with a sense of rejection.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya recollects the fable of the foolish crow and the wise sparrow, which she had often heard as a child. She does not repeat the story to her children because of the fear that they might store it in their subconscious and eventually turn out to be like "that damnably, insufferably, priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their babies...and to hell with the world. Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe"(17) Deshpande hints at the way in which the seemingly harmless bedtime stories influence children at a tender age to believe that a woman's job at all times is to protect her family even if she has resort to treachery or deceit.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya also recalls the *pativratas*- Sita, Savitri and Draupadi- mythical symbols of ideal wifedom, ironically comparing herself to them. "Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails". She feels that she has unconsciously emulated their example by following her husband into

hiding when he is faced with the threat of corruption charges. There are quite a few mythical allusions in Deshpande's novels but she does not believe that myth is used as a literary device. In reply to Lakshmi Holmstrom's question if myth is a kind of language she uses, Deshpande says: " I think so. I think a number of us do that in India all the time; we relate a great deal of our personal lives, our daily lives, to the myths we find parallels as a matter of course. And we do this with all the myths, any myth that seems appropriate, whether they were originally about men or women. In that sense it is a part of a language, a grammar that one knows and understands, rather than a conscious literary device".

## 7.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE AND THE TRADITION OF THE INDIAN NOVEL

The preceding chapters have attempted a thematic study of Deshpande's novels, with a special emphasis on the evolutionary characteristics of the female protagonist. After analyzing the inner struggles of the different central characters, we traced the various solutions and compromises arrived at by these women, with a slow but steady movement towards a positivism. Deshpande is gifted with an unborn literary bent of mind, which matured with her experiences in life. Even her graduation in Economics and Law did not seem to have much impact on her writing that came to her very naturally. Though she is the daughter of Sriranga, the famous Kannada playwright, who is known as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre, yet she never got any guidance from him in this field. She regrets the fact of being detached from her father. In the response to a question of Vanamala Viswanathan, she says: "If I should criticize him, I should say he was somewhat detached from us...never guided us. May be if he had directed us at an early age. I could have done better. He never did that".<sup>34</sup>

Deshpande writes not for publicity, but to mirror the society as she observes it. She is least bothered about name and fame. That is the reason why in spite of the fact that she had been writing for quite a long period, she still was unknown to many until her last novel *That Long Silence* got published by the Virgo Feminist Press, London. "It's meaningless that people know me as a person and not know what I've written. I feel publicity is not a good thing for a writer. It detracts from your work. You become interested in yourself as a person than as a writer. I'd rather be known for my books than for

myself<sup>35</sup> Her contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle-class woman: "I realize that I write what I write because. I have to. Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing"<sup>36</sup>

Though Deshpande writes for women, presents their problems, lets the world know the problems that women of today are facing, yet she cannot be categorized among feminist writers, close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals her enormous sympathy for women and their travails, provoking reviewers to assume that she has joined the band of feminist writers who have achieved much popularity in the West. She, however, does not approve of being labelled a feminist writer. Though Deshpande refuses to be called a feminist writer, her novels are susceptible to a feminist approach. She "makes it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles."<sup>37</sup> Rather her writing deals with the inner mind of the women. She has a remarkable insight into the working of a woman's mind. As a writer, she highlights the secondary position occupied by women and their degradation, which is inevitable in an oppressively male-dominated society. She gives us a peep into the state and condition of the present day woman who is intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under the weight of male chauvinism.

Deshpande's women are the products of a painful period of transition in society where they have a greater share of responsibilities than their predecessors. They also have a number of avenues open before them and, in many fields, they have also proved themselves better than their male counterparts. In spite of their remarkable achievements, the general attitude

towards women has not changed correspondingly. In the institution of marriage, the age-old rules with regard to the accepted behaviour of husband and wife remains almost unchanged, despite an overt display of Western influence.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's search for her identity—an exploration into the female psyche. Her protagonists undergo an arduous journey to discover themselves and this leads them through a maze of self-doubts and fears. In her novels, she depicts to a woman in myriad roles—wife, mother, daughter and an individual in her own right.

In all Deshpande's novels, except *Come Up and Be Dead*, the protagonists are married women. Hence her depiction of woman as wife requires special mention. According to Rani Dharkar. "The importance that our society attaches to marriage is reflected in our literature. It is the central concern of Deshpande whose heroines; caught in the quagmire of marriage, struggle to come up for air."<sup>38</sup> Marriage is, perhaps, the most complex of human relationships. It is defined, as a "cultural phenomenon, which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring"<sup>39</sup> Marriage is not simply a social institution. It is inextricably linked to religion, and religion, being a potent force in our country, determines more or less the code of conduct in marital relationships. Almost all the religions of the world give sanction to female subjugation by the male members of society, thereby perpetuating the myth of female servitude. The Bible categorically tells the woman:

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord."<sup>40</sup>



The ancient Hindu law-giver, Manu, whose philosophy occupies a prominent place in the mainstream of Hindu ideology and culture, proclaims: "Even though the husband be of bad character and seeks pleasure elsewhere he must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife"<sup>41</sup> Thus, it is clear that since time immemorial woman has been given an inferior position in society. It is also obvious that woman has been defined most exclusively in her role as wife. Susan Wadby substantiates this view by who, in her essay, "Women and the Hindu Tradition," says: "The dominant norms for the Hindu woman concern her role as wife. Classical Hindu laws focus almost exclusively on this aspect of the women. Role models and norms for mothers, daughters, sisters etc., are less prominent and are more apt to appear in folklore and vernacular tradition."<sup>42</sup>

Shashi Deshpande succinctly presents the inequalities and injustices heaped on woman because of her subordinate status. In *Roots and Shadows*, through the eyes of Indu, the protagonist, we are made aware of the plight of various women like her Kakis and Atyas. The heart-rending account of Akka's child marriage reveals the appalling condition of women barely a couple of generations ago. The inferior position of a wife in any marriage is made obvious through glimpses into the marriages of Indu's numerous aunts and uncles. It is clear that Indu, who is proud of her liberated outlook, falls a prey to age-old tradition and unreasonable convention. Deshpande also exposes the sham and hypocrisy prevalent in the so-called urban, educated men like Jayant who are ostensibly influenced by the West and who pretend to possess progressive ideas, but are, in reality, as chauvinistic and fettered to time-worn conventions as their less educated and exposed counterparts. He belongs to a

society, which prides itself on its sophistication and refinement, but at home he remains a conventional husband expecting his wife to play a very submissive role.

Saru's husband, Manohar, in *That Long Silence*, is a glaring example of men with fragile egos, who find it difficult to accept the superior status of their wives in society. Deshpande also holds society responsible for the disastrous condition of Saru's marriage. The cruel remarks of his colleague's wife and those of the girl who interviews Saru further humiliate Manu, who already suffers from an inferiority complex.

Mohan, Jaya's husband in *That Long Silence*, is a typical Indian husband who takes his wife's unflinching support for granted. When threatened with charges of corruption, he expects his wife to follow him into hiding without a murmur of protest. He does not mind using his wife, as a crutch in his hour of crisis and the slightest hint of deviation from her role of a subservient wife is enough to provoke a terrifying outburst with which he walks out of the home. Deshpande also shows how Jaya herself is to be blamed for the state of her marriage. In retrospection, Jaya realizes how she had all along followed her Vanita mami's advice that a husband is like a 'sheltering tree', which must be kept alive at any cost because without the tree the wife becomes dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. Jaya thinks that she has "To keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies."<sup>43</sup>

In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande makes a bold attempt to tackle the subject of marital rape. Through the character of Mira, she focuses attention on all those women who are doomed to silently suffer highly assaults by their

husbands because the very idea of a woman protesting against her husband's sexual advances is unheard of in our society. Deshpande also hints at the lack of compatibility in Urmi's marriage even though hers is a love marriage. Through the character of Shakutai, Deshpande shows how at the lower level of society, men flout marital vows most casually like Shakutai's husband. He is a good-for-nothing drunkard who leaves his wife and three children to fend for themselves and hankers after another woman.

The monogamous nature of women is hinted at in almost all the works of Deshpande. In most of her stories, the protagonist shares a greater level of compatibility with a man other than her husband. This compatibility often leads towards crossing of the boundary of platonic friendship and progresses towards physical attraction, but Deshpande's women do not overstep the limits of propriety except in the case of Indu in *Roots and Shadows* who resorts to an extra-marital relationship with Naren in an attempt to assert herself.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru meets her former classmate Padmakar Rao and the renewal of their friendship seems to border on an affair. Padmakar Rao who reveals dissatisfaction with his wife tries to lure Saru into a relationship. Vulnerable though she is, with the horrifying nocturnal attacks by her husband, Saru refuses to accept the advances made by him. She is however not averse to being flaunted around by Boozie who, she is aware, is using her as a cover to his homosexuality.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya finds a perfect match in Kamat, a widower who lives in a flat above hers. He is well read, and apparently he is a good critic. So he is able to offer her constructive criticism with regard to her writing. She is perfectly at ease in his company and confines all her problems

in him. She is never made to suffer any condescension in his company and this sets him apart from all the other men she has known in her life. In course of time, their friendship progresses towards physical attraction, but Jaya controls herself ruthlessly suppresses her desire, in spite of the ample opportunity provided in the seclusion of his apartment. Safeguarding her marriage is of such paramount interest to Jaya that on finding Kamat dead in his flat one day, she prefers to remain silent for the fear of getting involved in a scandal, thereby jeopardizing her marriage.

Similarly, Urmi's association with Dr. Bhasker in *The Binding Vine* develops into more than a platonic relationship. Urmi, whose husband is a naval officer and away for many months in a year, yearns at times for physical gratification. Dr. Bhaskar's self-admitted interest in her and her own attraction towards him offer her an opportunity to indulge in a physical union. But she refuses to let herself be enticed into an extra-marital affair.

Another recurrent relationship in Deshpande's novels is that between a mother and a daughter. Love and devotion to the mother is an integral part of the Indian psyche. Mythologies and literatures down the ages have always glorified the mother figure. Much has also been written about a mother's selfless love for her children. But the preference for a son is as old as Indian society itself. A wife's worth shoots up if she gives birth to a boy. Vedic verses pray that more sons, never daughters, should follow sons. For example, a prayer in the *Atharvaveda* reads:

The birth of a girl it elsewhere grant, here grant a son. (150)

There are, of course, economic and religious reasons behind such an attitude.

The presence of a son is absolutely necessary to perform many rituals, the

most important ones being those that are carried out upon the death of the parents and which are considered imperative for the well-being of their souls. The daughter, therefore, has not only negligible ritual significance but is also considered an enormous financial burden in as much as she does not contribute to the family income and instead takes away a considerable part of her family fortune as dowry.

But despite the yearning of all mothers to have sons, a mother's love for her daughter cannot be denied. Sudhir Kakar in an article on "Feminine Identity in India" says "the special maternal affection reserved for daughters, contrary to expectations deprived from social and cultural prescriptions, is partly to be explained by the fact that mother's unconscious identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son"<sup>44</sup> Shashi Deshpande's protagonists, however, never seem to be on cordial terms with their mothers. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu's mother dies in childbirth and so there is no delineation of the mother-daughter relationship. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, however, this relationship has a significant place. The entire novel, in fact, revolves around Saru's relationship with her mother. It is Saru's antagonism towards her mother and her rejection of the age-old traditional values represented by her that drive Saru into the arms of Manohar. During the crucial years of puberty, Saru develops an aversion to all traditional practice because of her mother's cold and indifferent attitude. She studies medicine to displease her mother and later marries out of caste to defy her. Even on her death-bed, Saru's mother has only curses for her daughter. Saru's, in turn, does not record any warm feelings of her daughter in her recollections, though

she makes sure to provide her daughter with all the material comforts and luxuries that she herself had been denied.

In *That Long Silence*, though there is no overt display of hostility between Jaya and her mother, it is evident that they do not share the same level of cordiality as Jaya and her father. Like Saru, Jaya too agrees to marry Mohan at the slightest hints of disapproval from her mother, and like her again she does not seem to have any strong maternal feelings towards her daughter. In a couple of instances, however, Jaya displays a stronger attachment towards her son. This provokes Subhas K. Jha to comment, "being intellectually equipped to scrutinize male prejudice, she (Jaya) still reveals an unmistakable partiality towards her son. The daughter is a mere blur in the narration, while the son (the heir apparent, the procreator) is described in glowing terms"<sup>45</sup>

In *The Binding Vine* too, it is obvious that there is no compatibility between the sophisticated Inni and her daughter, Urmi, the protagonist. At one point, in a choked and guilt-laden voice, Inni bursts out that Urmi had been sent to Ranidurg as a child to be brought up by her grandparents, because Urmi's father did not approve of the way his wife was bringing up the child. Shakutai also shares a love-hate relationship with her daughter, Kalpana. She keeps vacillating between praising her daughter and blaming her for the catastrophe.

These illustrations reveal that the relationship between mother and daughter in Deshpande's fiction is far from being warm-hearted. Adele King rightly comments: "In all Deshpande's works there is no mother who could serve as model for the daughter."<sup>46</sup> In an interview to Vanamala Vishwanath,

Deshpande admits that she does not believe in painting a rosy picture of motherhood. She says:

"It is necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing what I don't agree with is the idealization of motherhood- the false and sentimental notes that accompany it."<sup>47</sup>

Deshpande, therefore, rejects the stereotyped image of mother and refuses to use any mawkishly sentiment language to describe the mother-child relationship.

A study of Deshpande's novels from a feminist viewpoint also reveals the essential loneliness of the heroines bordering on alienation, reminding us of the plight of the protagonists of Anita Desai. In *Dark Holds No Terrors* where Saru as a child grows up almost resenting her mother, while her father remains a shadowy figure in the background. The man she falls in love with and marries, eventually turns out to be a psychological wreck with whom she cannot have a meaningful relationship. Her guru, Boozie, turns out to be a homosexual who had been merely using her as a pawn to hide sexual preferences. Padmakar has his own selfish reasons for waiting to develop a more intimate relationship with her. He likes to meet her because he finds no companionship in his wife who cannot think beyond mundane needs of everyday life. In her disillusionment, Saru thinks, "Love...how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called love."<sup>48</sup> Saru's own children are described as quite



indifferent to mother, and Saru herself does not indulge in any sentimental feelings towards them. Social visits to their friend's homes are described as routine and uninteresting and friends, both Saru and Manu's, provide no comfort either. At times the novel reads like an existentialist tract devoid of any sentiments and underlining the loneliness of man.

In *That Long Silence* too, Jaya stands alone in her hour of crisis. It is evident that after seventeen years of marriage, Jaya's relationship with Mohan goes no deeper than physical attachment. Her relationship with the other members of her family remain superficial and she seems to derive no satisfaction even from her children. The only person who offers her satisfying companionship and who animates her dies abruptly, leaving a void in her life. Even the physical attraction she initially feels for her husband gradually dwindles into routine and mechanical affairs, making her feel that "love is a myth without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unbearable" (97).

In Deshpande's sixth novel, *A Matter of Time*, the theme of alienation is even more pronounced. The author quotes extensively from the *Upanishads* to explain the sense of rootlessness and desolation experienced by the protagonist, Gopal, who abandons his wife and three teenaged daughters for some strange and inexplicable reason. The author also describes the pain and humiliation of Sumi, his wife, who copes with the situation admirably and tries to provide emotional and financial security for her three daughters.

Deshpande's novel, *Small Remedies*, is "a book about writing a book" with reflections on the impossibility of ever capturing in words the truth about any life. It examines, in retrieving memory, the complexities in encapsulating



the life of Savitribai Indorker, who is devoted to music. Running through the narrative of this remarkable woman is the saga of Leela, who defies conventional norms and remarries after her widowhood. It is through Madhu's eyes that we get to know the dark corners of Bai's life and the illuminating saga of Leela. In portraying the struggles of these women for identity, no overt postures of feminism are struck.

Shashi Deshpande's frank and uninhibited discussion on a wide range of topics concerning women has prompted several reviewers to categorize her as a feminist. A close study of her work also reveals that she is a highly sensitive writer who is clearly aware of the male-female imbalance in society. Her male characters conform to the standard feminist description of a middle-class husband who is insensitive, egoistic and sometimes over-ambitious. But, at the same time, most of her women characters too suffer from some weakness or other so much so that it becomes difficult to label her work.

The term feminism itself demands a broader definition. In a generic way it has come to mean a movement to support the demand for equal social, political and economic rights with men. Feminism connotes not only an awareness of women's plight but also a determination to change the situation. The treatise *'Half the Sky'* aptly defines feminism as "The awareness of the women's position in society as one of disadvantages or inequality compared with that of men and also a desire to remove those disadvantages"<sup>49</sup>. One wonders whether Deshpande as a novelist fulfills these two requirements so as to be termed a feminist writer. We may not be sure of her strong desire to remove the disadvantages of women in society, but even a casual reading of her novels and short stories convinces us that they abound in her acute

awareness of women's disadvantages and unequal position in society. In a recently published article, she writes:

Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing roles enjoined on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing very clearly woman's writing<sup>50</sup>.

Deshpande's novels bear out and even demonstrate what she holds in theory. *Roots And Shadows* is mainly concerned with women who are given a raw deal. Beginning with the protagonist Indu, the novel is replete with the private agonies of several women covering a wide cross section- educated women, illiterate women, widows, child-brides, domestic servants-all of whom have some genuine grouse or other. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a typical example of a husband's inability to come to terms with his wife's superior social and economic status. Deshpande gives a vivid portrayal of a woman who falls a prey to her husband's frustrations when he realizes that she has overtaken him professionally. The novel also traces the traumatic childhood of Saru who is the victim of gender bias at the hands of an insensitive mother.

*That Long Silence* is an autobiographical account of Jaya, a gifted writer, whose talent lies smothered under the disapproval of her husband. Jaya seeks to erase the long silence by giving an honest and frank account of the

conditions, which lead to her failure as a writer and the constraints of society, which result in the suppression of her self as an individual.

*The Binding Vine* is a tragic tale of rape sanctioned by marriage in the case of Mira and the brutal rape of Kalpana. It reveals the trauma involved in a rape whether committed within or outside the precincts of marriage. The novel, in a subtle way, also traces the martyrdom of women like Inni, Vanaa and Shakutai.

Thus, the novels of Shashi Deshpande clearly reveal the author's perception of the endemic imbalance between the sexes. It is, however, obvious that the author stops short of trying to correct this imbalance. The numerous minor characters in the novels suffer in silence or accept their fate with resignation but do not take any step, which might jeopardize their marriage or reputation in society. It is however important to note that each of her novels ends on a note of determination by its protagonist who resolves to take the reins of her life into her hands. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* emerges in greater control over herself at the end of the novel. She puts Akka's money to use according to the dictates of her conscience and does not bow to pressure from any quarter. She also gives up the job, where she had earlier worked only to avoid displeasing her husband, and settles down to pursue her writing, something which she had always wanted to do. With her new found sense of liberation also comes the realization that any freedom she devises must be within the boundaries of her obligations and responsibilities. She is able to appreciate what Naren's father says about rules adding grace and dignity to life.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is finally liberated and she is no longer afraid of the dark. Kamini Dinesh's observation aptly sums up Saru's development as an individual in her own right, "To be true to herself, the woman has to exorcise the film of superimposed attitudes and roles. Her emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon the untapped inner reserves of strength."<sup>51</sup> At the end of the novel, Saru stands poised to receive her husband secure in her new found confidence in herself. She successfully rids herself of her complexes and guilts and comprehends the meaning of human life where she realizes that she is not the only one facing the predicament of loneliness: "Alright, so I'm alone. But so's every one else. Human beings... they're going to fail you. But because there are just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk". (220)

*That Long Silence* too ends on a note of hope, with the protagonist Jaya's realization that she is no less to be blamed for allowing her to be dictated by her husband and by the conventions of society. She achieves a kind of catharsis by penning her story and she is able to view the situation more objectively. She says: "I'm Mohan's wife I thought, and cut off bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible." (191). This awareness helps her to cast aside the role she had willingly played all her life.

*The Binding Vine* is, perhaps, the only novel where the heroine, Urmi, is less wrapped in her own discontentment and, despite her recent bereavement, or because of it, gets involved in the misfortunes of others. She shows a positive attitude towards the victims around her. She resolves to get

Mira's poems published and is determined to draw society's attention to the predicament of the rape victim, Kalpana. Indira Nityanandam observes that "The step forward achieved in this novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one"<sup>52</sup> Comparing *The Binding Vine* with Deshpande's earlier novels, Nityanandam comments: " *The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from first three novels of Shashi Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonist here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes"(66).

What, however, we have to bear in mind is that Shashi Deshpande does not take the radical view of the early Western feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and Kate Millett. The opinion of most of these Feminists with regard to marriage remains more or less the same. In her famous book, *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir writes: "It has been said that marriage diminishes man, which is often true, but almost always it annihilates woman"<sup>53</sup>. Germaine Greer suggests, "If independence is a necessary concomitant of freedom, woman must not marry."<sup>54</sup> Kate Millett feels that marriage reduces the status of woman to a mere object for decoration and a tool to be used for man's sexual gratification. Deshpande's protagonists are, no doubt, victims of this unequal power structure in marriage, but in all her novels she shows how one can rise above such injustice and lead a meaningful existence. In the end, her protagonists almost always strive to make their marriages work. As J. Bhavani observes: "This is not a negative but a realistic end to the novels. Deshpande upholds marriage as the backbone of society, what is stifling is the persona of the wife and not the institution of marriage."<sup>55</sup>

We may say that Deshpande's views coincide with modern feminist thought which has changed much since the radical feminism of the 1960s. In her book, *The Feminist Mystique*, which took American society by storm, Betty Friedan challenged the universal belief that a woman should find contentment in motherhood and domesticity. Two decades later, Betty Friedan in her book, *The Second Stage*, says that humanity can survive only if women make certain compromises. She suggests that women should pursue some meaningful activity within marriage in order to find happiness and contentment in their lives.

But it is obvious that Deshpande never intends to subscribe to the views of any feminist. Her characters, though urban and educated, are firmly rooted in India with the weight of centuries of tradition and culture behind them. In his essay, "problematising Feminism", Jaidev says: "It is very necessary for us to have feminism in this country but then this feminism has to be authentic, rooted and context-bound. One does not mind if our feminists are not too clever or good at quoting western critics or weaving intricate post-structuralist cobwebs."<sup>56</sup>

Deshpande may not be a formal feminist in the strict sense of the word, but it must also be observed that feminism can mean different things to different people. Arshia Sattar in her thought-provoking article on the position of the feminist movement at present observes:

"Feminism is no longer a single voice that speaks for all women irrespective of creed and colour. It is, rather, a 'rainbow coalition' of rights, desires, agendas, struggles, victories. Not all issues apply to all

women, our battles need not be the same and, more and more, we tend to speak for ourselves rather than for all of us."<sup>57</sup>

Whether or not she is a feminist; Shashi Deshpande has definitely carved a niche for herself in voicing the thoughts and feelings of the educated, urban middle-class woman. Though Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal have all ventured into this area of writing, none has pursued it with the single-mindedness and relentlessness of Deshpande. She has

"Never sworn allegiance to what we normally think of as feminist theories of the novel and yet or maybe because of the absence of this overt avowal, she has succeeded in providing her readers with a perspective which is simultaneously, truly individualistic and feminine."<sup>58</sup>

She is basically interested in the issues, not just pertaining to women, but extended to all humanity. Despite her disapproval, she has been considered a 'woman writer', rather than a writer who deals with "human issues" which are "of interest to all humanity". This has been made clear by Shashi Deshpande herself most recently in her article 'Of Concern, of Anxieties', where she says:

I have been put into the slot of woman writer, my writing; my writing has been categorized as 'writing about women' or 'feminist' writing. In this process, much in it has been missed. I have been denied the place and dignity of a writer who is dealing with issues that are human issues, of interest to all humanity (100).

From this it is clear that Shashi Deshpande is more humanist than a womanist or a feminist.



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